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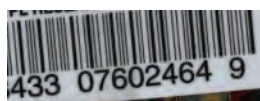
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**THE CURIOUS CASE
OF MARIE DUPONT**



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OF MARIE DUPONT**



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"There's this the matter!" he said. "I've got to know where you and Gavock met before!"

THE CURIOUS CASE OF MARIE DUPONT


BY
ADELE LUEHRMANN
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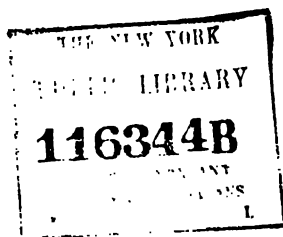
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To
MY MOTHER

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**THE CURIOUS CASE OF
MARIE DUPONT**



THE CURIOUS CASE OF MARIE DUPONT

CHAPTER I

IT was a raw March day. As Roger Gavock walked the short distance that lay between his hotel, the luxurious Crustacea, and Fifth Avenue a spurt of wind caught his hat and gave it a twist. He saved it by a clutch and having rounded the corner paused and carefully readjusted it at its usual precise angle.

His gaze wandered up the avenue, then down. It had become the finest business street in the world, he had been told by Americans whom he had encountered in Paris, and after his twenty years' absence from New York he had naturally expected to find many changes. But here he could detect nothing else. If anything familiar remained it eluded his sweeping glance.

He lingered a minute uncertainly, then turned southward and proceeded at the brisk pace habitual with him. He was not in a hurry, being bent merely upon sight-seeing; indeed, he had rarely hurried in his life. Quickness of movement was temperamental, the result

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of quick thought, and was far more characteristic than the deliberateness with which he had replaced his hat. But one cannot live from twenty-seven to forty-seven among a people treated so niggardly by nature that they have perforce helped themselves out with art and not acquire some of their infinite capacity for taking pains.

As his eyes sped through the passing throngs he was conscious of distinct disappointment. It was at the women that he looked and the sight left him chilled, repulsed. They were handsome, many of them, but how self-contained, remote, unindividual! No warming glances enlivened a walk down this finest of streets. One might as well be eighty and wear one's hat over one's eyes!

Gavock smiled a wry smile at his own expense. He was neither vain nor a libertine, and few men of his fortune and leisure had lived more sedately; for though he had known many phases of European life his rôle for the most part had been that of spectator. And it was a surprise to him now to discover how much he had depended on the passing show for his warmth and life. Here, it seemed, he might expect little of either. Here, beauty requited respectful admiration with nothing better than a cold, impersonal stare. He regretted Paris, its flash of alert eyes, the half-smiles of gracious lips, the perpetual, incorrigible coquetry. What matter if the faces in repose were plain since they so rarely knew repose?

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Lost in a retrospective mood he strode on unseeing, when suddenly a boy carrying a large box dashed through the moving crowd and ran into his arms. The collision sent them both spinning, but the boy quickly recovered his footing and dashed on, while Gavock in attempting to regain his balance staggered wildly and finally lunged into a lady who was in the act of descending from a limousine. The impact threw her against the open door of the car and he saved himself from sprawling on her by clutching the door handle. With a tremendous effort he managed to steady himself sufficiently to gasp out an apology.

"Pardonnez-moi, Madame!"

"Ça ne fait rien, Monsieur." The customary formula came back instantly.

She was none the worse for the encounter, apparently, but one hand had flown to her hat to assure itself that all was well and during that brief investigation their eyes met. Hers were frankly smiling, kindly but amusedly, and, though he was too human to enjoy being ridiculous, he smiled back from sheer gratitude that the charming young person had not found him offensive.

For, in spite of unsteady legs and general discomposure, he had somehow contrived to notice that her eyes were young and beautiful. And he had noted more than that. He knew that they were dark and very large and that their lashes fell toward cheeks,

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smooth and softly rounded and richly glowing. And he saw that the lovely head surmounted a charming figure elegantly clad, and also that the limousine from which it had descended was all that was most approvable in limousines.

All this with much detail was stamped upon his mind instantaneously and indelibly. The next moment she had slipped by him and was crossing the pavement toward a shop entrance. Looking after her he saw that the hem of her gown was torn and hung down on one side. He must have trodden on it! Impulsively he gained her side and, indicating the damage he had done, poured out apologies in French.

She had turned as he accosted her and now seemed to regard him with surprise. Her smile was gone. She was lovely still but cold and aloof.

"I beg your pardon?" she said, inquiringly.

The English struck him like a dash of ice water. For the moment he was dumb.

"I didn't understand you," she explained courteously when he failed to speak. "I don't understand French."

For an instant he stared at her in astonishment, then pulled himself together and repeated his apologies in English.

She glanced down at her frock with a quick shrug which was certainly French, he reflected. "It doesn't matter," she said indifferently, smiled faintly, whisked up her skirt, and disappeared into the shop.

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He gazed after her a moment blankly, then turning, resumed his walk. He was puzzled.

He had addressed her first in French and she had answered him in French. He was sure of that; he recalled his exact words and hers. It was natural enough that he should have spoken French for it had been the language of his daily use for years and in the excitement of the moment habit had prevailed. And she had replied with the usual phrase, replied instantly, unthinkingly, as any Frenchwoman might have done. He recalled perfectly her voice and pronunciation. The latter had been quite without accent.

And her English had been good too, the English of England rather than of America. He had known Englishwomen, and Americans too, educated in France, who spoke French like natives; but they also understood it and this perplexing person had distinctly declared that she did not. And why under heaven should she lie about it?

Unconsciously Gavock slackened his pace. Before his eyes the charming face of the unknown fluttered persistently, as an actor's sometimes will after the curtain has fallen. Suddenly he stopped short at the flash of a new idea through his mind. The face was familiar! Somewhere he had seen it before.

And now he was conscious of the stirring of his memory. He waited in a quiver of expectancy. In a moment he would have it, the time and the place. Odd that it had not struck him at once, but then he

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had been so upset by the awkwardness of his position.

Where? When? Impatient, he began to prod his memory. He prodded in vain. It was tantalizing, maddening, to have the thing elude him like that. Abruptly he wheeled and retraced his steps.

CHAPTER II

I HAPPENED on a very pretty puzzle this afternoon," said Gavock.

"Blonde or brunette?" Guy Amarinth asked, with a grin.

Gavock's rather plain face crinkled into an attractive smile. He drained his demi-tasse, peering over it quizzically at his young host who took his coffee standing, his back to the pleasant blaze of the gas logs.

Guy Amarinth was undoubtedly a very handsome man. This conclusion Gavock reached for the twentieth time that evening and for the twentieth time regretted it. The boy was too like his mother. He would have been better with less of her beauty and more of his father's charming plainness. For two hours now Gavock had been watching for traces of his old friend and missing them.

It was not the absence of a physical likeness to his father that he deplored in the young man before him. The mother's robust slenderness had passed to her son in a man's full portion and the finely chiseled features were amply masculine. But behind the blue eyes shining so pleasantly upon him now Gavock felt none of the alert sympathy, the warm exuberance of

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spirit, that had made the father so rare a friend. Strength of will was evident in the handsome face; but was it the fearless, generous strength of the father that could curb itself in renunciation? Or was it only the mean tenacity of purpose that in Mrs. Amarinth had spent itself wholly on selfish ends?

Time alone could answer that question, Gavock reflected behind the smile which had responded to his host's bantering query.

"My dear boy," he said, "throughout the excellent dinner you have just given me it has been painfully apparent that some one has been furnishing me with a very sad reputation."

Young Amarinth laughed. "Oh, then I am to understand that it was not a woman — this time?"

"On the contrary, it *was* a woman — this time," Gavock retorted. "But don't make the mistake that most of my old acquaintances over here do make, I fancy, that with me it always is a woman. If I have talked a great deal of women to-night it is because I have talked of life, and woman is life's dynamo. Whether to create or to destroy, she turns the wheels. And life fascinates me, in much the same way, no doubt, that pictures fascinate the man who studies them and writes about them — because he cannot paint them."

There was a pause. Amarinth felt that he ought to say something but could not find words, and when his guest took up the cigar lying on the tabouret be-

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side his chair he struck a match and held it without speaking. As the flame lit up the rugged, aging face before him the young man recalled the story — heard long ago and all but forgotten — that Roger Gavock had expatriated himself because of an early and disastrous marriage.

"Thanks, Guy," Gavock said when his cigar was drawing. "You won't mind, I'm sure, if I call you by your given name?"

"I wish you would, sir," Guy replied. "I've heard so much about you it does n't seem possible that we had never met until a few hours ago."

"It was a great pleasure to find you here and a relief to be able to turn my legal tangles over to you. Nothing could have been better — except finding your father himself."

A few moments of silence paid tribute to the dead.

"But now for your question: 'Blonde or brunette?'" said Gavock, reverting to the light, genial tone which was habitual with him. "The lady was *brune*, decidedly. A French type, I should say."

"Young?"

"Under twenty-five, certainly, and apparently of our best class; charmingly attired, small of stature, svelte, graceful, vivacious, chic, pretty. Does she interest you?"

"Immensely! Just my style, in fact."

As though involuntarily, the young man's glance sought a framed photograph placed conspicuously on

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the mannish writing-table which occupied a corner of the small sitting-room.

Gavock's observant eye followed the glance. "Ah, a puzzle of your own, I see!"

Guy flushed and admitted that he was still "guessing."

"I'd like to take a look if I may before I go," said Gavock.

"Certainly. It will repay you, I think. But let's have your story."

"By all means. I want to know how it strikes you."

"As a lawyer?"

"Oh, no — as a person of intelligence," Gavock laughed.

Amarinth returned the laugh through the smoke of his cigarette. "Proceed," he said, dropping into a chair and settling himself to listen.

Briefly Gavock related his encounter of the afternoon. "I resumed my walk down the avenue," he said finally, "Madame's charming face dancing before my eyes, when suddenly it flashed upon me that the face was familiar. And the more I think of it the more convinced I become that somewhere I have seen it before. But where or when, I cannot for the life of me remember. I've been nagging at my memory for hours. You know how elusive and tantalizing such a recollection can be. I have gone back ten years, from place to place that I have visited, reliving

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my life as nearly as possible, trying vainly to recover that lost trail. It remains always just beyond my reach."

"Perhaps it's just a chance resemblance."

But Gavock shook his head with decision. "No, the feeling that sort of thing gives is quite different; it soon ceases to haunt you. But what do you make of the facts?"

"Make of them? How?"

"I mean the fact that the lady lied, for instance; that she said she did not understand French when she did."

"But perhaps she did n't! Lots of people understand a few ordinary phrases of a foreign language and nothing more. Even such a dub at French as I am can say: '*Ça ne fait rien.*' It means: 'It's of no consequence,' does n't it?"

"Yes. Say it again."

Guy repeated the French. Gavock laughed.

"You might as well wave the Stars and Stripes, Guy. It's a short sentence but a hard test of pronunciation, because it contains the letter 'r,' a sound all but impossible of mastery by a foreign tongue. I have struggled with it sufficiently to recognize it in its absolute perfection as I heard it this afternoon. That any one could achieve that perfection and yet lack an understanding of the simple phrases I used afterwards is not humanly possible."

"But are you sure she answered you in French the

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first time? Could n't you be mistaken about that? You were rather upset, you say, and —"

"My dear boy, I can hear her as distinctly in memory as I just heard you. It is n't possible that I was mistaken. Add to that my conviction of having seen her before. Now what conclusion do you draw?"

Guy hesitated. "I hardly know," he said at last. "It seems very odd. I should be inclined to take her at her word. Why under the sun should she lie about a thing like that?"

"Well, I can think of one reason — and only one."

There was a pause. Gavock carefully ashed his cigar. Amarinth watched him, waiting silently for him to continue.

"It occurs to me that she might have recognized me and have thought I should be less likely to recognize her, here in America, if unaided by the knowledge that she was French. She had given French for my French, involuntarily, as any Frenchwoman would have done under the circumstances; but seeing that I did not recognize her she decided probably not to take further risks, thinking perhaps that I had not noticed the first slip. As it happened, the very precaution she took to throw me off the track was exactly what threw me on."

Amarinth stared blankly. "But why should n't she have wanted you to recognize her?"

"Ah, that's the point! That's the puzzle. Who

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is she? Who is she and what under heaven does she imagine she has to fear from me?"

"Fear!"

"Is n't fear usually back of a lie? She's afraid of me, that much is clear."

Amarinth leaned forward eagerly. "I say, is n't it possible that she is a married woman with a past — a past that you know about? Of course, she would n't want you to recognize her in that case."

"Yes, that's the obvious explanation," said Gavock, but his tone was doubtful.

"Why is n't it the right one?" Guy demanded. "I'll bet it is! Good Lord, it's like a novel or a play! Why, you might meet her in her own house some day and suddenly remember where you'd seen her before."

"No such luck, I fear. Life gives us few such piquant moments."

"What? You mean you'd like it?"

"Of course. Who would n't?"

"Well, I should think it might be deuced unpleasant," Guy answered. "Why, suppose she were the wife of some one you knew?"

"What of it? I have, I hope, sufficient *savoir faire* not to betray myself even to her — to say nothing of her husband."

"But suppose you had to? Suppose the circumstances were such that you felt it your duty to tell her husband what you knew about her?"

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A frown gathered between Gavock's brows and he bent upon his young host a sharp glance of puzzled dismay. He had stumbled upon a mental by-path it did not please him to discover in the son of his best friend, and with all his efforts to the contrary he could not keep a note of coldness out of his reply.

"I cannot conceive of such a case," was all he said.

"But if the man were your friend?"

"If he were my brother — if he demanded the truth from me — I should lie with a clear conscience and, I trust, convincingly."

The coldness and disapproval in Gavock's tone had become unmistakable and brought a heated retort from Guy.

"You are thinking of the woman, I of the man," he said.

"I, too, am thinking of the man," Gavock returned. "I should as soon think of telling a man the truth about his unvirtuous wife as I should think of telling the truth to a child about the mutilated doll she fondles."

"Well, *I* should want to know!" Guy declared warmly, making the question a personal one with characteristic egotism. "And I believe that any man would," he added.

"Most men think so — until they are told."

"Well, no fool's paradise for mine!"

A swift, dark flush swept Gavock's face. He opened his lips but immediately closed them again on

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unspoken words. His mouth hardened. Then, as if some feeling denied verbal expression had claimed the outlet of bodily action, he sprang up, flung his cigar to the hearth and stamped out its fire with a sharp grind of his heel. But when he presently turned back to his host who had also risen his face had relaxed into its customary cheerful calm and he laid a hand on Amaranth's shoulder with affectionate pressure.

"You've a right to your opinion, dear boy, but I have an idea that twenty years from now you'll find that it has changed. And when you see a poor devil clutching blindly at his little scrap of happiness — and scraps are about all most of us get, you'll find — you'll not be the one to rob him of it, nor will you thank any one for robbing you."

"But a man's wife is — well, different from other things to him. She's part of him — her dishonor is his dishonor."

Gavock sighed. "Dishonor is like immorality, Guy; largely a question of geography. But we're off on an unprofitable tack," he added, again discarding his serious mood. "The husband of my mysterious lady is in no immediate danger of being deceived by any one, for the best of reasons. She has no husband."

"How do you know that?" Guy asked, taken rather aback.

"I followed her. Yes, I was interested enough and idle enough for that. I took a cab and followed her."

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I saw her enter a house — her home — in the most fashionable part of town. I noticed that a policeman, passing as she alighted from her car, touched his hat respectfully, and when she had disappeared within the house I pumped him. *Voilà!* The lady is still 'Miss.' "

"Miss what?"

"That's my secret. And I shall certainly not share it with any one who holds such rigorous views as to the rights of husbands," Gavock laughed. "You see, she might marry a friend of yours."

"I'm not sure she is n't already married."

"Neither am I. She is n't generally known to be, that's all I'm sure of. Where I have seen her before, I have n't an idea — not the remotest. But I have seen her! And I shall jump at the first chance which offers to see her again, in spite of the fact that she evidently does n't wish to see me again."

He looked at his watch. "By Jove, I had no idea it was so late! You have an engagement, you said. I hope our long talk has n't delayed you."

"Not at all. I've plenty of time. It's a dance, a charity benefit and starts late. Sorry you won't join me. There's going to be some rather attractive exhibition dancing."

"Thanks. It's good of you to ask me, but I feel a bit let down by the voyage and want to turn in early. If you're leaving now we might start together. Where is the dance?"

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"The Esplanade. It's on your way. I'll get your hat and coat and 'phone for a cab."

"Good. And while you're doing that I'll take my look at your charming friend over there."

With a laughing permission Amarinth went out and Gavock crossed to the writing-table and took up the photograph which had attracted his notice earlier in the evening.

As his glance fell on the face in the frame he started sharply. His hand groped nervously in a pocket and brought out a pair of eye-glasses which he hastily adjusted, casting an anxious look toward the door through which his host had disappeared. Stepping back into the light of the center chandelier he stared at the picture. His brows met in the tenseness of his scrutiny.

Suddenly Amarinth's returning step sounded at the door. Instantly Gavock relaxed his gaze and turned a clear countenance to greet the young man.

"A lovely face—really lovely. Is she fair or dark?" he asked.

"Blonde or brunette?" laughed Guy. "My answer's the same as yours. She's dark, both hair and eyes."

Gavock smiled faintly at the pleasantry. "I should have guessed her dark," he said. "But you can't always tell from a photograph. Tall or—'as high as your heart'?"

Guy laughed again. "She's not tall," he admitted.

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"A recent picture?"

"Yes, and a splendid likeness."

Gavock extended the frame to arm's length and regarded it approvingly. "A most charming face," he pronounced heartily. "And I dare say I once knew the young lady's parents well and that she is one of those clever children who have taken advantage of my absence to grow up?" The light speech ended on a note of inquiry.

"No, you've missed fire there. Miss Dupont is not an American."

"Dupont? The name is French."

"She's English."

"Indeed! In that case I may have been right, after all. I know an English family of Duponts — in Surrey. There were several girls, I remember. Let me see — Elspeth and Gladys and there was a third, I think —"

"Marie?"

"I think not," said Gavock, appearing to search his memory.

"I hardly think Miss Dupont belongs to that family except perhaps distantly," Guy said. "She's an orphan and lives here with an old school friend of her mother — Mrs. Alicia Thorley. Perhaps you know her, she's a New Yorker."

"I have heard of her. She married an Englishman and they had a place near Paris — rather a nice place.

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Some friends of mine bought it after Thorley's death. A very nice place, I remember —"

His voice trailed off as though he were lost in memories. "Does Miss Dupont care for Paris?" he asked abruptly.

"She's never been there."

"Indeed!" Gavock carefully replaced the photograph on the desk.

"She lived in England until her mother died, then she came over here with Mrs. Thorley and has never been back."

Gavock accepted his host's aid in putting on his overcoat. Then, turning, he looked up at the handsome young face, a good six inches above his own.

"How old are you, Guy?" he asked.

"Twenty-five."

"I thought about that. You were hardly more than a baby when I saw you last. I remember the occasion distinctly. Your father and I were smoking in the library after dinner and your mother brought you in to say good-night to us."

He paused a moment, then, his hand on the younger man's arm and his voice a bit unsteady, he added: "You've lost them both, my boy, and sometimes you — miss them?"

Amarinth did not answer except with a twitch of his mouth.

"Of course," Gavock said. "Well, I don't know

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whether I need to say it, but I will say it. If you ever come to the time when you miss him too much — need him, I mean — will you come to me? I loved him, Guy. And it was n't given to me to return in any measure what I owed him. So I want you to feel that you inherited my debt to him. I want you to know that there's nothing I would have done for him that I would n't do for you. I wonder if you understand?"

There was a short silence. Guy's face reddened with the embarrassment that any speech touching the hidden springs of feeling is almost sure to bring to an American, especially a young one.

"I do understand," he stammered. "It's awfully good of you, sir."

"Then that's settled," Gavock said briskly, sweeping sentiment aside. He glanced again toward the photograph and asked lightly over his shoulder:

"Hoping for a sight of Miss Dupont at the dance to-night?"

"Oh, yes. We're to do a stunt together — one of the exhibition dances. She's a corking dancer and pulls me through somehow."

Gavock wheeled. "My dear boy, why under the sun did n't you tell me that before? I had no idea that you were to be an actor in the *fête*! That quite alters the matter. With your permission I'll change my mind and go along."

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"Good!" said Guy heartily. "Really, I don't believe you'll be bored."

Gavock gave a short, queer laugh.

"I'm quite sure of that," he said.

CHAPTER III

“**M**ARIE DUPONT! *Where* did you get that gown?”

The girl addressed had just let her long evening coat slip from her bare shoulders into the waiting arms of a maid, and the quick cry of admiration which greeted her appearance drew to her every eye in the dressing-room. Even the maid, turning away to dispose of her burden, looked back and remained staring.

There was an odd, breath-held, gasping pause, and as Marie Dupont's dark eyes sent a lightning glance from face to face of her companions she enjoyed a triumph that would have delighted any girl. The expressions she encountered were as varied as the natures of their wearers: involuntary admiration, generous tribute, envy, chagrin.

“Stephanie never made that!”

It was little Beth Tate who again spoke. Her nature was incapable of envy, yet as her eyes swept the circle of silent figures, all clad, as she knew, by Stephanie, the fashionable dressmaker of the winter, they ended with a glance of disdain at her own pretty but conventional frock.

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"You got it over from Paris, did n't you?"

This time the speaker was Sybil Lowther, a tall ash blonde, whose clinging chiffon draperies undressed her rather startlingly. The words were not so much a question as an accusation of an unfair advantage taken.

Marie Dupont's quick ear caught the hostile note and over her face swept a pink wave of distress.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, thrusting her flattened palms from her as if to put away by sheer force the unjust suspicion. "I did not get it from Paris! Stephanie did make it! But—" She paused an instant and again her expressive hands were voluble. "*I designed it.*"

"You!" It was a chorus of incredulity.

"I—just!" She laughed out happily at the unbelief. "Ask Stephanie!"

"But, Marie, where did you ever get the idea?" Beth Tate demanded.

"Out of my head, of course."

She tapped her forehead with two pink finger-tips, then, facing the cheval mirror, she swept her hands lightly back over the dark mass of hair lying flat against her small head like a dusky veil outlining a perfect oval of creamy skin, below which the lovely curves of throat and shoulders melted into the bewildering radiance of her wonderful gown.

At the vision the glass gave back her lips opened with a quick breath. Compared with the attenuated color schemes of the costumes about her, her own

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stood out with primitive force and drew the eye as dancing flames draw it from garish draperies. What miracle of chiffon, reds, and golds, and a myriad of intervening hues had achieved the throbbing effect of flame and fire, one neither knew nor cared. From cold blue to hot crimson the gamut of color ran, swirling about her as she moved like fiery tongues from a crackling blaze.

"Gee, Marie, you look like a houri — or a house afire!" was the verdict of Cornelia O'Rourke, a wholesome, athletic girl with a wide, Irish mouth.

"I feel like one, Connie," was the answer. "At least, I don't feel like Marie Dupont, and that's the main thing. Of course, it's different with the rest of you — your dances are the ordinary ones that we're used to seeing done in modern dress and it would be absurd to costume those fantastically. But my dance itself is unusual. I could n't have done it in an everyday dance frock — I simply could n't! It would have been like Farrar doing 'Butterfly' in a tailor-made. She could n't."

A shrug of her shoulders dismissed the possibility.

"I was in despair," she went on. "I could feel what I wanted but I could n't see it. And poor Stephanie could n't help me. How could she? I could n't describe what I could n't see. I tell you it was maddening!"

She laughed excitedly. "Night after night I lay awake trying to see the dress that somehow I felt

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was there at the back of my head. And one morning when I woke up I had it! I saw it as distinctly as if I had seen it the day before in a shop window."

"Perhaps you had," remarked Sybil Lowther over her shoulder as she swayed her slender form in a sensuous movement of the dance she was rehearsing.

The ill-feeling in her tone was so marked that Beth Tate spoke hastily to cover it. "I always see myself walking about in my things before they are made."

"Your dress is a corker, Marie, and so is your dance," Cornelia O'Rourke added heartily. "But I don't see why Madame Adrienne could n't have thought up some new ones for all of us. What's the sense in challenging comparison with professionals by doing their stunts. Look at me, for instance, doing the Pavlowa Gavotte. Gee!"

"You wanted to do it," Sybil Lowther reminded her.

"I know it," Cornelia admitted ruefully. "I saw Pavlowa and went dippy. But last night Uncle Dan came in while Ted and I were rehearsing. 'What do you call that stunt?' he asked. 'Pavlowa Gavotte, is it? Looks to me more like an O'Rourke Cavort'!"

There was a general laugh, but Marie Dupont's voice broke through it.

"I think that was a compliment," she declared. "It means that you don't imitate Pavlowa, that you put yourself into it, that you create something. I like the way you do it."

Cornelia's wide mouth was stretched to its limits in a

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grin. "You're one sweet lamb, Marie, but I guess the only thing my dancing'll ever create is a riot," she said.

A maid came into the room and spoke to Miss Dupont. "Mr. Amarinth wishes you to know that he's come. He says he'd like to go through the dance if you have time."

"Please tell him that I'll be there in a minute."

The maid went out and after a last survey of herself in the mirror Marie Dupont followed.

"She's the only honest-to-Gawd dancer in the bunch," Cornelia remarked, looking after her. "Do you girls remember the day she first did that flying pirouette and how surprised Madame Adrienne was?"

"Madame Adrienne did n't believe Miss Dupont was doing it for the first time," said Sybil Lowther, now at a mirror. "I don't believe it either. I think she's studied dancing before — so does Madame Adrienne."

"What of Madame Adrienne?" a sharp nasal voice inquired in the doorway.

Every eye turned to the dancing mistress. There was a pause.

"I was just saying," answered Miss Lowther, "that Miss Dupont dances so well that she must have taken lessons before she came to you."

Madame shrugged her fat shoulders. "Miss Dupont says not and evidently Miss Dupont should know."

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The Frenchwoman's black, bead-like eyes peered about the room from under her thick black brows. Formerly a member of the ballet of the Opera in Paris, she was now fat and fifty and glad to take advantage of the modern dance craze to turn an honest penny.

"Has Miss Niklova not yet arrived?"

"I think not, Madame," Beth Tate answered. "I have n't seen her."

Madame frowned anxiously. "She should be here. The orchestra waits to begin, the ballroom is already crowded."

"Her brother's sick, she told me yesterday at rehearsal. Maybe he's worse," suggested Cornelia O'Rourke.

Madame nodded thoughtfully.

"What shall we do if she does n't come?" Miss Lowther asked, alarm in her voice. "The orchestra will be sure to play my music too fast."

"She will come," Madame retorted shortly. "These children of idleness were inconceivably stupid! "She comes to work, not to play."

As she turned to leave the room Cornelia cornered her.

"I'm getting cold feet, Madame," she said. "I'm afraid I'll disgrace you to-night. If you want to scratch me, go ahead."

"*Scratch* you!" Madame echoed, astonished.

"I mean, cut me out, leave me off the program."

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"But never! Compose yourself, my child. I have changed the name of your dance — so all will be well. It is called '*danse eccentricque*.' It is not of Pavlowa, it is of itself. The public will find it piquant. You will have a *succès* — oh, but I say it — a *succès enorme*! You will see!"

"Madame Adrienne, how do you like my gown?"

It was Sybil Lowther who next arrested Madame's departure from the room. She turned slowly for Madame's inspection.

The Frenchwoman's noncommittal eyes appraised the daring costume. "It is enchanting, Mademoiselle," she said.

"What do you think of Miss Dupont's?"

"Ah!" Madame's sallow face lighted swiftly, then instantly she veiled her bead-like eyes. "It is a miracle. Miss Dupont is a miracle. Ah, *enfin*!"

The final words were an exclamation of relief as a girl carrying a violin case burst breathlessly into the room. She was Irma Niklova, small, thin to emaciation, and of a sickly pallor.

"I am late, Madame," she panted. "I regret."

Nervously she unwound a faded blue scarf from about her head and throat, while Madame Adrienne unbuttoned the rough serge coat and took it from her.

"You tremble, my child," said Madame.

"I ran — I feared to delay you."

"Are we going to begin now that Miss Niklova has come?" Miss Lowther asked, pausing at the door.

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"Immediately. You are ready?" Madame's glance included the few girls who still remained in the room.

They assented and one after the other strolled out. Cornelia O'Rourke was the last. She lingered a moment in the doorway.

"I hope your brother's better, Miss Niklova," she said.

"Thank you, yes, much better." The Russian girl forced a wan smile.

"I'm so glad," Cornelia smiled sympathetically and passed out.

Alone with her assistant, Madame dropped English for French. "The brother is better then? That is good."

The girl shook her head and shivered.

"He is worse, much worse. But why speak of it to these people? What do they understand? Their houses are always warm, their bodies covered, their stomachs full. What do they know of us? They only play at living!"

She was beating her hands together to send what little blood her wasted body could provide into them that they might be warm enough to play the violin.

"Who cares for him to-night?"

The pale cheeks of the girl flushed quickly. "A friend—a painter who lives over us. He is of this country, but poor like us and understands. Pavlo is safe with him as with me."

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She unlocked her violin case and took out her instrument. Her thin hands were still discolored from the cold. In her shabby evening gown her extreme meagerness of flesh was painfully apparent. The bones in her neck protruded sharply.

"You look not well," Madame announced, regarding the girl anxiously. She hesitated. "Were it not for the music for Miss Dupont's solo I should send you home."

Irma Niklova made a quick gesture of dissent.

"No, no, I must stay! If I am thought to be unreliable I shall find no more engagements."

Madame nodded with a sigh for the truth of the argument. Then, with a brisk movement she caught up the faded scarf, passed it around the girl's throat, letting the ends fall with merciful concealment over the thin arms.

"So. That is better."

From without came the sound of the tuning of instruments.

"Come, my child."

At the door Irma Niklova halted.

"Madame, in the music for Miss Dupont's solo bid the orchestra be silent. It is better I play alone. The rhythm is all. They do not understand. They do not follow. Miss Dupont dances like an artist. She must be followed, not led."

Madame nodded. "You are right. I will so order."

CHAPTER IV

YOUR responsibility as host ends here," said Gavock, when he and Amarinth paused at the entrance to the grand ballroom of the Esplanade. "I have my coat check, you have yours, and if I feel like leaving before the show ends I want to feel free to go, so we'll say good night here." He held out his hand.

Amarinth took it but he answered protestingly: "I want you to meet Miss Dupont. Our dance is the last on the program and of course she won't want to show herself until then. There is to be general dancing and supper afterwards, you know."

"I shall be delighted to meet Miss Dupont and hope to have the pleasure to-night," Gavock returned. "But it is no longer very early and I feel rather fagged. I have n't the luck to be five and twenty, you see. So if you don't find me about you'll know that old age has crept upon me and sent me to bed. In which case just dismiss me from your mind."

"At least let me find you a seat and introduce you to some of my friends—"

"My dear fellow, I shall probably stumble upon acquaintances before I am half way across the room."

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He turned and looked about. "Ah! I think I see a familiar face already — Mrs. Estell. Over there, see, in green — now she is turning this way. She sees me! She does n't believe her eyes." He nodded smilingly to the distant lady. "She's beckoning." He waved assent. "You know her?" he asked, seeing that Amarinth was also bowing.

"Yes. And I know you'll not be lonely now." Unconsciously Amarinth gave a little sigh of relief.

Gavock caught the sigh. "Poor boy, he takes his duties as host very seriously," he thought. "And I'm afraid he takes life very seriously. I only hope he does n't find soon that life may be too serious to be taken seriously."

Aloud he said: "Good night, if we don't meet again. I'll 'phone you to-morrow or the day after, when my papers are all together. And remember, if you don't see me about later, don't page me!"

"Oh, you won't run away now," Guy laughed. "Mrs. Estell will see to that."

"At any rate I've arranged for retreat should retreat seem advisable," Gavock reflected as he made his way across the room.

During the drive to the hotel from Amarinth's apartment he had repented of his impulsive decision to accompany his young friend. "I shall jump at the first chance that offers to see her again," he had said and he had done just that. In consequence he found himself confronting a situation he did not enjoy. His

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puzzle had become too personal to be pleasant. Mystery is not a domestic virtue and a lady with a past is more interesting in our neighbor's family than in our own.

Was it possible that he had been mistaken about that French phrase? He questioned himself eagerly. He would have welcomed the slightest sense of doubt in his mind. But he found none.

"I can hear her distinctly. It was French and perfect French, as I told the boy. But why, by all that's damnable, did I tell him? Certainly my evil genius has a finger in this pie."

If only he could place her! If only he had some inkling as to the nature of her secret — if, indeed, she had a secret! However, to-night he would have ample opportunity to watch her unseen —

Unseen, yes; but would his presence be unknown to her? What more likely than that Guy should speak to her of him? And if she knew his face no doubt she also knew his name. Would it not, after all, be wiser to avoid a meeting in Amaranth's presence? Decidedly yes.

Still, if the meeting were postponed a few days — it could hardly be avoided altogether — Guy might tell her the story of the puzzling encounter on Fifth Avenue — it was just the sort of thing people liked to pass along. She would know then that she was suspected, while to-night he might convince her by his manner that she had successfully evaded recognition. Was it

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not better that they should meet while she felt herself secure? If she heard the story from Guy later she would understand that she could rely on his silence. To lessen the ordeal for her was all he thought of for the present. The rest must be left to time.

Mrs. Estell greeted his arrival effusively. She was a vivacious young woman just emerging from the shadows into the sunshine of widowhood. He was instantly ordered to occupy a chair that stood vacant beside her own.

"I hope I'm not depriving any one," he said, accepting the seat.

She laughed. "You ought to say you hope you are," she corrected. "Now tell me, do you dance?"

"I decline to answer by advice of counsel."

"You don't! Heavens, what have you come to New York for?"

"Can't I stay?"

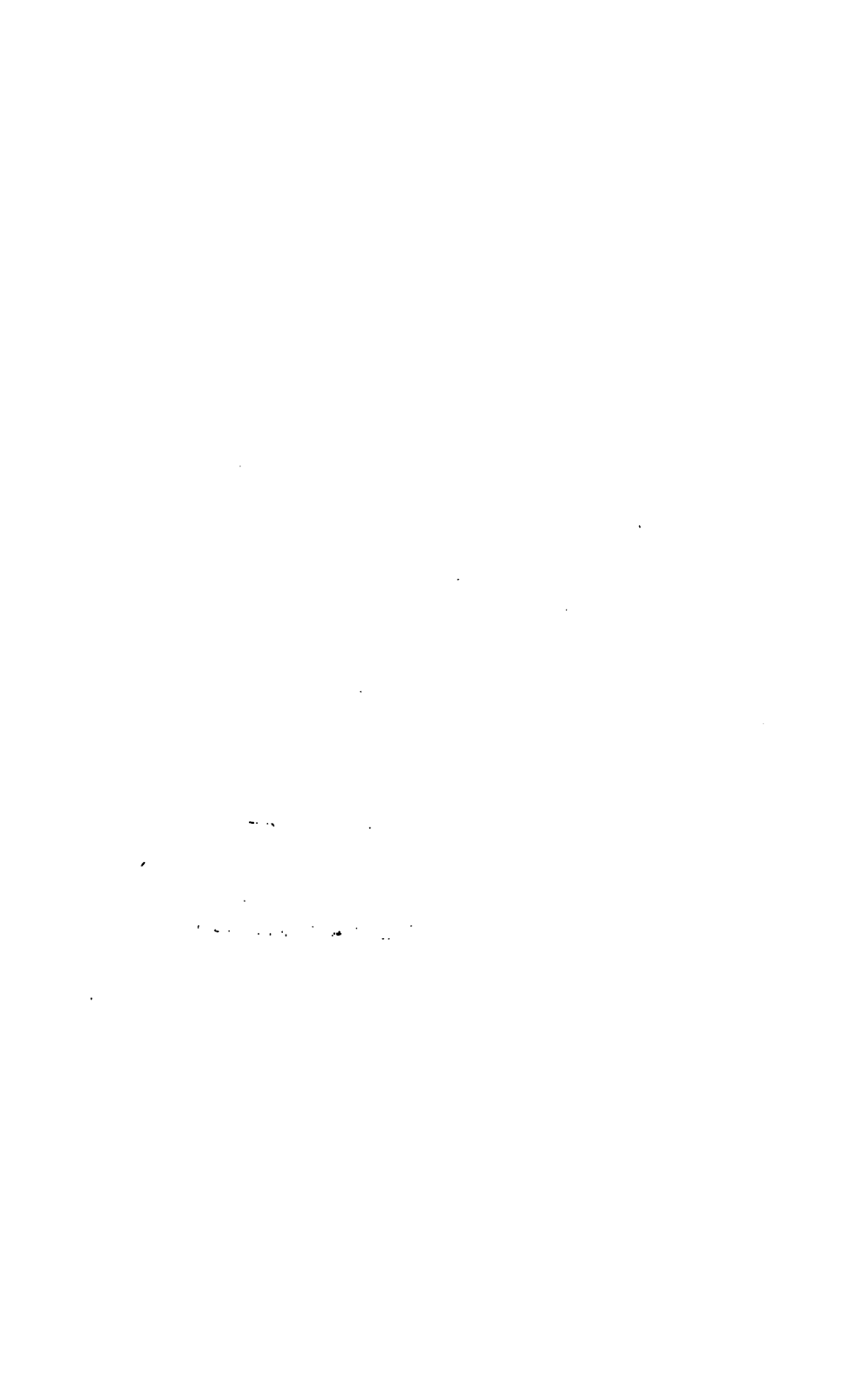
"Oh, you can, but you won't. What will you do? There'll be no one to talk to you. We've all lost the power of speech. We only talk with our toes."

Her nimble tongue immediately belied her, for she began to ply Gavock with questions and in return to give him all her own news and that of her friends. They had met often in Paris and had many acquaintances in common. Some of these occasionally interrupted the talk, pausing for words of greeting.

"Aren't they ever going to begin?" Mrs. Estell had wondered several times before her question was



She was frankly smiling, and he smiled back in sheer gratitude



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finally answered by the appearance of the musicians in the small balcony above the stage. They scraped and fretted their instruments into tune, then, resting them against knee or arm, they stared curiously down upon the audience.

"Heavens, what a wraith of a woman!" Mrs. Estell exclaimed as Irma Niklova joined the group of men in the balcony.

The Russian girl raised her violin to her shoulder and at the signal the men posed their instruments for action.

"She seems to be the leader," Gavock observed.

"Yes. She plays regularly for Adrienne's dancing classes, I believe, and they are probably specially engaged for the evening. Her story is quite tragic — if it's true. They say she was a student at the Imperial Conservatory in St. Petersburg — she's Russian — and a career was predicted for her. Then her father, a violinist in the orchestra at the Opera, fell under the suspicion of the police and was sent to Siberia. The girl was in consequence dismissed from the Conservatory and could find no employment. Somehow she managed to get over here. She looks as if she were half-starved, does n't she — Oh!"

Mrs. Estell's serious tone changed abruptly to one of delight, as the opening strain of a waltz filled the room. "That's 'Love in the Air' — the most heavenly hesitation!"

The curtains at the back of the stage were drawn

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aside by unseen hands and a young man and girl entered, dancing. A friendly ripple of applause greeted them.

"Beth Tate and Fred Crawley — nice children," Gavock's companion informed him. "You must n't expect much from the program, you know — they are all amateurs. We have n't come to see the dancing, we've come to dance ourselves." Her hands and feet moved expectantly in time with the music. "I can hardly wait," she cried.

The "nice children" made their exit amid more clapping of indulgent hands. Several couples followed them and were similarly rewarded for their efforts. The *danse eccentricque* of Cornelia O'Rourke and her brother had the success Madame Adrienne had predicted, being rendered with rompish glee that was contagious, and had to be repeated.

"This is Sybil Lowther," Mrs. Estell announced as the next pair of dancers entered on the slow, sensuous strains of a tango. "She's by way of being a professional. She's a Canadian and used to do drawing-room recitations in Canadian-French dialect — the *habitant* things, you know — but she starved at it, I guess, and went in for dancing when the craze for that started. She affects a temperament."

"So I see."

They watched the dancing in silence for several minutes. Miss Lowther's posturings and writhings, designed to register on the minds of her audience as

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suppressed passions that tortured her soul, were contradicted by the cold, steady gleam of her eyes and firm set of her lips. Her partner, selected no doubt as a foil, was a fresh-cheeked boy with an expression as placid as a feeding infant's.

"The ability to exalt oneself and to give oneself — that is a clever Frenchman's definition of temperament," Gavock remarked presently.

"And we Anglo-Saxons have n't it," said Mrs. Estell. "We've got nerves, a sort of ingrowing temperament, not a bit showy and very uncomfortable."

Gavock smiled in agreement, then glancing back at Miss Lowther he asked: "Why does she try for it, I wonder? She's pretty and graceful; why attempt the impossible?"

"Because she thinks it makes her more interesting and to be interesting is her *métier*. She lives by it, poor dear. She's a Salamander."

"A what?"

"A Salamander. It's a kind of bug, is n't it, or a lizard that fire won't burn? Well, anyhow it's the fashionable name for a girl who teeters along the brink of perdition, working men for anything she can get out of them, flowers, clothes, jewels — anything except actual money, and giving in return — well, nothing."

"But surely a girl who accepts so much must expose herself to — er — er —"

"Impossibilities?" laughed Mrs. Estell. "That's

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what Tommy Nave calls them — don't you love it? Of course she does, constantly. But she manages to keep her footing. Not from any overplus of virtue, I fancy, but from sheer, cool-headed canniness that makes her cling to respectability as to life itself."

"But is a girl who knowingly exposes herself to such advances considered respectable?"

"Oh, she maintains a semi-respectability that serves her purpose well enough."

"Very semi, I should say."

"Demi, I should say," laughed the lady. "But it serves, as you see."

The dance had ended and Miss Lowther and her partner had returned to acknowledge the plaudits that recompensed them. With her arms full of flowers the girl bowed her thanks right and left, then, as the applause moderated, instead of retiring through the back exit she came down a short flight of steps that led from the stage to the auditorium.

"I'm going to present you," Mrs. Estell said, starting up and signaling the girl who was approaching them. "You may find the species interesting. But I warn you that your gray hairs will not protect your bank balance."

"I'll run while I can then," Gavock laughed, making a feint at departure.

She seized his arm. "No, *I'm* going to run," she said, then detaining Miss Lowther who had come abreast of them, she introduced Gavock. "Mr. Roger

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Gavock, my dear — straight from Paris, and mad to know you."

Gavock bowed. The girl held out her hand and smiled at him above the mass of roses in her arms.

"*Enchantée*, Monsieur."

"Take my seat, Miss Lowther," Mrs. Estell said.

Miss Lowther hesitated. "I don't want to deprive you, Mrs. Estell," she murmured as she sent a swift glance around the room. It did not need Mrs. Estell's significant glance to inform Gavock that the young lady was probably looking for bigger game.

"I'm running away," Mrs. Estell urged briskly. "Tommy Nave is over there holding up the door and developing a grouch. He came late and I ignored him but I think he's been punished enough. At any rate if I punish him any more he'll leave and I need him to dance with. You see, Mr. Man, the advantage of being a dancer!" With this to Gavock she left them.

"Don't you dance, Mr. Gavock?" Miss Lowther asked as she settled herself and arranged her flowers effectively.

"My dear young lady! Dance at my age!"

Her blue eyes widened as with huge surprise. "But you're not old!"

He knew it was blatant flattery and nothing else, but for the life of him he could n't help liking it. He smiled, half at her, half at his weakness.

"You must learn," she said.

"Please tempt me."

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She smiled, her eyes narrowed, straight into his eyes.

"Did you like my dancing?"

"I was charmed."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she exclaimed fervently.

"I've worked so hard — Oh, terribly hard. And I'm so ambitious. I want to do something quite wonderful some day, something different. I want —"

She broke off and, releasing her hold on her roses, she clasped her hands on her breast and leaned toward him with parted lips. "I want to be the greatest dancer in the world!"

"Well, well, that's rather a large order, is n't it?" he asked.

"Is it?" She seemed to consider. Then she sighed. "Perhaps it is," she admitted with a slow shrug. "But I am as I am! I can't want anything less than the best. I can't! I'm that way in everything, books, pictures, people — men."

At the final word her eyes dropped to her flowers. "To the man who realized my ideal I would give anything — everything."

Gavock frowned in instinctive distaste. Really she was too obvious. He could not resist remarking dryly: "But if you are to be the greatest dancer in the world you can't afford to give either time or thought to mere men." He wondered how she would take that.

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She sighed prettily and raised her roses close to her face. Only a veiled half-glance reached him.

"That's woman's eternal struggle, is n't it?" she asked. "The struggle between art and — love?"

She waited a moment as though to let that sink in and perhaps, as he thought, to see what he would say. When he said nothing she suddenly changed her manner. Dropping her flowers back to her lap again she looked up at him and smiled frankly.

"Of course, I was speaking then of my great ambition, my life aim; but, after all, life is made up of little things and each day brings its own small wishes and desires. For instance, to-night my immediate ambition is to have supper with a man so rich that I shan't have to look at the right-hand column of the menu before I look at the left."

He laughed out heartily. She was charming when she was like that, natural and girlish.

"What a mercenary young person!"

"Am I?" She turned her eyes away and her mouth hardened. "I'm a very hungry one," she said.

Her tone was so serious that, startled, Gavock shot a sharp look at her. She stared before her, no hint of jesting in her face. He felt at a loss how to take her and she seemed indisposed to help him. At last he spoke, feeling that the words were being dragged out of him.

"Will you honor me by taking supper with me?"

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"Oh, I did n't mean that!" she cried, turning wide blue eyes upon him in shocked protest. "Please don't think I was hinting! Of course, I'd love to accept if — if you really want me."

She gave him a wistful glance and looked away. She had reverted to her first manner, she was acting again, he perceived. He was conscious of a sudden distaste, almost disgust of her.

"Then that's settled," he said simply.

The music, starting at that moment for the next number on the program, cut short the conversation. The instant after Gavock had forgotten his companion, for Guy Amarinth and his dancing partner had appeared on the stage, sweeping in on the full swing of the melody.

Gavock leaned forward in his seat, every muscle tense. Around him he was aware of a startled rustling, then silence.

The girl was indeed a vision of arresting loveliness. If, in the dressing-room, surrounded by other types of youthful beauty, she had shone supreme, here, with Amarinth's black form as a foil, behind the glare of the footlights and with all the exaggeration that the stage itself lends to everything upon it, Marie Dupont seemed an exotic creature with a radiance that allured while it dazzled.

Gavock's eyes followed her face as it offered itself to his view from an ever-changing angle; now the pure profile, again only the curve of a cheek and black

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crown of hair, and again, showing above the rim of Guy's shoulder, the full face.

It was for the full face that he now began eagerly to watch. He had been so sure that another sight of it would recall to his mind the time and place that he had seen it first. But the memory still escaped him, though he had a sense of its being nearer than before. One more look at the eyes and he would have it. That was his feeling; but again and again the chance came and brought him nothing.

Forgetful of his surroundings he vented his disappointment in a sharp exclamation of impatience. The girl at his side turned to him instantly.

"Don't you like it?" he heard her say. But he did not at once seize her meaning; in his absorption in the dancer he had not noticed the dance. As he stupidly stared in momentary bewilderment his attention was caught by the sharp contrast between the face before him and the one his eyes had just left. Here was hard, cold perfection; there, faults of outline were suffused and lost in the glow of an ardent spirit.

When the sense of Miss Lowther's question reached him he parried deftly, by asking: "Do you?"

She smiled back narrowly. "I asked first."

"What do you call the dance?"

"The program calls it '*Fantaisie de la Russie*.' Madame Adrienne arranged it. It's a combination of various figures from Russian ballets. Of course,

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Mr. Amaranth is little more than a lay figure; it's virtually a solo for Miss Dupont."

She was right about that, Gavock presently decided. The part his young friend played was chiefly that of target for the *pas seuls* of his charming partner. Some of these were executed with his arm supporting her, others as she whirled about him, others with him as mere spectator.

To do nothing before an audience is not easy, and Gavock observed with satisfaction that Guy accomplished it gracefully. Indeed, he seemed unconscious of himself, wholly absorbed in the movements of his partner, alert in his emptiest moments for her return to his embrace.

"He's mad about her," Miss Lowther remarked as if divining Gavock's thought. "Do you like her dancing?"

"It's very good, is n't it?" Gavock replied. "To me it seems amazingly good."

"You're right, Mr. Gavock, it is — amazing."

The word was spoken with such significant emphasis that Gavock turned a startled look of inquiry on the speaker. What did she mean? What did she know?

Miss Lowther explained. "It's amazing, because Miss Dupont says she has never had dancing lessons before this winter. Now I don't believe that, and Madame Adrienne does n't believe it. Look at what she's doing now! That's a flying pirouette. Why,

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you have to learn that sort of thing when you 're six — not twenty-six."

Gavock had detected the note of jealousy in his companion's tone and he barely suppressed a smile at her frank implication of her rival's age. But the arresting note in her speech was the hint at mystery, secrecy. Did she *know* anything?

"But why should she not tell the truth —"

His question was cut short by a sudden burst of applause which greeted the dancer as, having achieved two rapid repetitions of the flying pirouette, she came to a position of rest, smiling, her head thrown back, her arms thrust out, palms up.

It was a gesture ages old. No one in that audience but had seen it a hundred times. The bareback rider of the circus, the tumbler at a country fair, the magician of vaudeville, the *première danseuse* at the opera, their feats accomplished, smile at the audience, arms out, palms up. It is the mountebank's appeal for plaudits and an audience responds to it almost mechanically. Mechanically Gavock raised his hands to clap. Then he stopped short.

Why had the girl done such a thing? Where had she learned it? It was a professional's trick, and in such a place it was not fitting. Yet how charmingly she held the pose!

He was conscious that in the back of his head a new idea was groping.

That the pause in the dance was unrehearsed was

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obvious, For the musicians played on until waved to sudden silence by a movement of the Russian girl's violin bow. It seemed also to have taken Amarinth unawares. Caught on a forward glide, arms out as if his partner were about to whirl into them, he halted awkwardly.

This Gavock noted in a glance, all he could spare from the girl who at that moment held every eye. Suddenly she changed her pose. Her smile vanished, her arms swept backward, palms down. She swayed now to one side, then to the other, in a long slow rhythm. The flame-like colors of her gown gave her the appearance of a slender, waving torch. The applause stopped. An expectant hush fell on the room.

Gavock glanced up at the musicians, wondering why they did not play. Their instruments were in position, their eyes were on their leader.

Irma Niklova stood at the balcony railing, her bow-hand resting on it, clasping the bow, her violin against her shoulder, ready. She was looking down at the dancer, the muscles of her thin face taut, her eyes narrowed with the intensity of her gaze.

From side to side the dancer swayed, again and again. Then slowly she began to move to the right, making a strange sweeping movement with her arms.

Irma Niklova straightened herself with a start. Her bow flew to her instrument and she drew it. Behind her other arms moved. The result was a shrieking discord. She wheeled furiously and her

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bow cut the air in a savage gesture of arrest. Then she turned and played alone.

Now again the dancer paused. Her arms swept slowly forward and grew tense; then with a swift movement she strained them backward as though pushing something from her. Her head sank back upon her shoulders, stretching the long line from chin to bosom. Thus poised she began to advance as in a stately march, but by movements of hidden muscles the brilliant draperies of her gown were kept swirling about her like wind-driven flames.

From Irma Niklova's violin haunting dissonances made up a strain that was like a dirge, wild and barbaric.

Gavock looked at Guy Amarinth. He had withdrawn somewhat to the back of the stage where he stood, forgotten and forgetful, apparently, of himself and everything except the form of the dancing girl on which his eyes were bent.

Now the stately advance was halted. Marie Dupont raised her head, her chin shot forward, her arms swept round upon a circle and sank, crossing themselves, upon her breast. Wide and expressionless her eyes stared out, her teeth showed in a mirthless smile. She began to execute some rapid sideward steps, her knees bent almost to a sitting posture, her feet darting out alternately from beneath her skirts.

"Russian!"

One heard the hissing of the word as it passed from

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lip to lip. Something at last appeared familiar. There was a rustle through the audience as of relaxed tension.

Another change. The dancer rose again to her full height, her lips closed to a thin line, her eyes narrowed to a black slit. And she entered on a dizzying whirl, to right, then left, in ever-increasing rapidity.

The violin of the Russian girl followed every movement, clinging like a shadow. The player seemed no longer to watch the dance. She was like a reflection that moved by the other's volition. Her bow swerved and trembled, faster, louder, wilder, leaping along the scale in intervals weird and harrowing to Western nerves. From the audience came a sound that was louder, more poignant than a rustle. It was as though, involuntarily, many moved, squirming. But no sound came from any lips.

Then, with the sharp, explosive noise of snapping sinew the music stopped. A violin string had broken.

A woman in the audience cried out hysterically, there was a discordant shiver from the violin. Irma Niklova thrust the useless instrument upon the musician nearest her and seized his own. But she was too late. The dancer had stopped.

She swayed dizzily and several people started from their seats, but Amarinth had reached her side and she moved into his arms in dancing position. He stumbled awkwardly into step with her and together they glided across the stage. Gavock, watching, saw her

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look up toward the music gallery from which only silence came. He too looked up.

As once before, the white face of the Russian girl stared down uncertainly. But only for a moment. Abruptly she started to play, and at her signal the men about her swept into the melody which Gavock recognized as the one which the applause had interrupted.

"What was it? What happened?" he asked Miss Lowther.

She answered with a puzzled frown. "I don't know. I never saw that part before, the part she did alone, after they clapped. She and Niklova must have rehearsed it privately and Adrienne kept it for a surprise." Her lips tightened. "You must have seen much dancing in Paris. Tell me, do you think that was the work of a novice?"

Gavock looked at her. Envy and anger spoke in face and voice. Of course, he thought, she was right; the dancing they had just witnessed was certainly not the work of a novice. The clean-cut precision of its technique alone set it apart from the other performances of the evening. The idea that had stirred in the back of his head was emerging.

There was little more of the dance. It closed with a repetition of a figure previously given, and twice the dancers were recalled to bow their acknowledgments. Then the spectators, eager for the general dancing that was to follow, began making their way toward the empty ballroom beyond.

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A young man claimed Miss Lowther and she left Gavock with a gay reminder of their supper engagement.

Left alone, he stared a moment at the curtained entrance at the back of the stage. The face of Marie Dupont seemed to float there, mocking him, as earlier in the day it had floated just beyond his reach. If, only for a moment, he could lose his sense of his surroundings he might be able to pierce the veil that seemed to hang before his eyes, shutting out the scene of which that lovely face had made a part. It was so near that a word, a look —

“Mr. Gavock! Mr. Gavock! Do come here!”

It was the voice of Mrs. Estell, calling. He saw her in a group near by. A few steps brought him to her side.

“What is the name of that little theater in Paris — in Montmartre somewhere — you go up a narrow street where a cab can’t go, then down some steps? Poor Dick took me there on our wedding trip to see a dancer people were raving about just then. She did that whirling business that Marie Dupont did to-night and had a gown that gave something of the same effect.”

“It must have been the Drowned Cat,” said Tommy Nave.

“It was n’t. I know it was n’t, because I teased Dick to take me to the Drowned Cat and he would n’t.

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It was some kind of a bird — the Red Canary or the Green Swan or —”

“*The Purple Pigeon!*”

The words were Gavock's. They were almost a shout, yet it seemed to him that some one else had spoken them.

“That's it! The Purple Pigeon!” cried Mrs. Estell. “I'm so glad you remembered it. I could n't, and it was driving me mad.”

“And you're driving me mad!” said Tommy Nave. “Listen to that music and we're missing it!”

He swept her away and Gavock was alone again, looking after the rapidly dispersing crowd.

“*Le Pigeon Pourpre!*”

The veil was rent. He had his desire. He stared vacantly, seeing only the mental vision which the name had evoked.

A curious shudder ran through him. Why — why — surely the thing was impossible, incredible! And yet —

CHAPTER V

IN the dressing-room Irma Niklova was replacing the broken string on her violin. Beside her sat Madame Adrienne.

"Well, my child, and what do you say now of this Miss Dupont?"

Irma's thin shoulders rose and fell in a weary shrug.

"The first day, Madame, you said to me: 'She is a dancer,' and I answered you: 'Evidently.' Is it not so?"

Madame Adrienne nodded.

"*Eh bien!* To-day, I know no more than then. I say this only: Here is something we do not understand, something we do not know."

"When she says she has not danced before, she lies," said Madame.

"Evidently."

"And to-night — your word of honor, is it, that you have not rehearsed together? That part that she has never done —"

The girl's fingers paused in their work and she looked up.

"Dear Madame, you are my friend, my one friend; without the work you give me to do I should starve —

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I and the brother who is my life. Why should I deceive you?"

"But the music — you followed always. It could not have been better. How was that possible?"

"Madame, listen! My father played first violin in the orchestra of the Petersburg Opera. That you know. A violin was in my hand when I could not yet walk or talk. Already at seven I played for the rehearsals of the ballet. A thousand times have I played the music of 'Kanesbka.' It was from 'Kanesbka' that you made the dance for Miss Dupont, was it not?"

"You are right."

"You never danced in Petersburg, you have told me, Madame; only in Paris and Moscow. Of those operas I do not know, but in Petersburg the *ensemble* from which you took the steps for Miss Dupont's dance was followed always by the grand solo. A thousand times have I seen it, a thousand times played it."

Madame Adrienne nodded. "The grand solo — it was that she danced. And it was not I who taught it her! The thought did not come to me of such a thing. The grand solo from 'Kanesbka.' *Mon dieu!* For that one begins to dance as you began to play, my child — in the cradle!"

"When I saw what she was doing, it was my fingers that followed, not my head. I could play it in my grave."

"Who is this girl?" Madame demanded. "Marie Dupont! A French name. But she says she is Eng-

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lish. She lives with Americans and she dances like a Russian!"

"It is as I have said, Madame. Here is something we do not understand, something we do not know."

"Marie Dupont!" Madame repeated the name thoughtfully. "It tells one nothing."

"Nothing," agreed Irma Niklova.

"It is as if in English one should say 'Mary Smith.'"

CHAPTER VI

“THEY ’VE begun to dance! We ’re missing it!” Marie Dupont sprang up and faced Guy Amaranth expectantly. They were alone in one of the Esplanade’s small reception-rooms whither he had led her for a cool, quiet moment as soon as the applause which followed their dance had stopped.

He did not move as she stood looking down at him. His handsome blue eyes were riveted on her face and he might well have been dazzled by her dark beauty, heightened as it was by the rich color which excitement had given to her cheeks. For a moment neither spoke. Then she turned her head toward the open door as a louder strain of music reached them.

“It ’s a waltz and we ’re missing it,” she repeated.

“Well, it ’s mine and I want to miss it. Sit down — *please!*” He drew her back to the seat beside him. “You ’re tired anyway.”

“Tired! I could dance forever!” She flung out her arms exultantly.

He gave a short laugh. “I thought you were going to when you left me there twiddling my thumbs. Really, I think you might have told me you were going to spring that new part.”

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"New part! Why will you keep saying that? There was no new part. It was all exactly as we had rehearsed it — exactly."

He shook his head. "No, I had never rehearsed the part you danced after Miss Niklova stopped the orchestra and played alone. Why, I'd never even seen it!"

"Of course you had. You've simply forgotten it, that's all. Miss Niklova told me she was going to play alone because the men got the time all wrong. That was the only change."

"Oh, all right," he conceded. "I must have dreamed it, I guess. I'm always dreaming about you any way. Wish I could make you dream a little about me, Marie."

She started up again but again he held her back.

"I'm not going to let you run away this time. You've got to listen to me to-night. I can't go on like this. I want my answer. Do you love me or don't you?"

He spoke rapidly and with determination but his eyes watched her anxiously.

She answered reluctantly, her gaze on his hand which covered her own. "I don't know."

"But you must know! Why you — let me kiss you once."

"It's not fair to remind me of that. You promised to forget it."

He laughed. "How could I forget it when it was

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the one bit of hope you've ever given me? I was half mad with happiness that night and the next day. The next day I — what do you suppose I did?"

She looked up wonderingly. He gazed back, silent.

"What did you do?" she asked at last.

"Oh, nothing much — just got a marriage license."

"Guy!"

"Well, I said I was crazy! For weeks you'd been holding me off — would n't let me say a word. I was beginning to think you were playing with me, that I had n't a chance. But that night you were different somehow —" He paused a moment as though trying to recover a lost memory. "I don't know just how it happened, my kissing you, but —"

"I did n't promise anything," she interrupted in a low voice.

"No, but you'd said once you did n't believe you'd ever marry unless you were to do it on the spur of the moment, unless the man just happened to strike you at the psychological moment —"

"I did n't mean that literally — you might have known I did n't!" she protested. "And yet — I don't know — perhaps I did."

She turned away from him and her dark eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

He waited.

"To go away — alone with the man you love — just the two of you — and be married without fuss or

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feathers, without a mob of people you don't care for and who don't care for you. To be married quietly and no one to know until — afterwards."

She paused and there was again silence between them. Suddenly, as though the undercurrents of their moods had met, his arm slipped round her and she yielded to its pressure. Her head dropped to his shoulder and lips reached for lips.

It was a long kiss. A swell of distant melody, far-away voices that laughed, other sounds of revelry, vague and impersonal, stole into the silence of the little room, unnoted. Slowly the sweetness of her surrendered form mounted to his brain. His breathing grew faster.

She drew back sharply and looked at him.

"Marry me to-night!" he whispered.

"To-night!"

"Why not? We'll go away now, just you and I, as you said, without any fuss or any people. I've got the license."

"Here?"

"No; at my rooms. Listen. We can slip away — it's early." He looked at his watch. "Just eleven. We'll get a taxi, stop at my rooms a moment and then find a minister —"

"What minister?"

"Any one. Yours."

"He'd ask questions."

"Well, there's the one that married Ned Jessup

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and Grace Eustis. He does n't know us and he 's near. We can do it and be back in half an hour."

He watched her eagerly. She did not meet his glance, but sat staring before her, biting her lips nervously.

"I wonder what Aunt Alicia would say — and Hugh."

"They would n't care," he urged. "They know me. They would n't object if we told them, would they?"

"No."

"And Mrs. Thorley would probably be relieved not to have the bother of a wedding. Marie, if you love me you 'll do it!"

"I do love you," she said, turning troubled eyes to his.

"Then you will?"

He caught her in his arms again and tried to draw her face to his, but she pressed her hands against his shoulders, keeping herself at arm's length.

"Do you really love me?" she asked.

"Yes."

"More than anything else in the world?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if you really do?"

"Don't wonder, dear — believe it." His voice was very tender, very earnest.

A minute more she searched his face. It seemed to satisfy her.

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"I do believe you," she said. "And I'll marry you to-night."

"Darling!"

She let him have his kiss now. Then he said: "Listen. You wait here. I'll get your coat and bring it to you and we'll slip away without being seen."

He started for the door, but turned back to ask anxiously, "You'll wait? You promise?"

She nodded. "I promise."

Leaving her he sped down the corridor to get his hat and coat and on the way ran into Gavock, who promptly accosted him. After a few words of flattering comment on the dance in which the young man had figured, Gavock said:

"By the way, I hope you have n't forgotten your promise to present me to Miss Dupont."

"No — no," Amarinth stammered. "A little later on, if you don't mind. Miss Dupont is engaged just now."

"Later then," Gavock agreed.

As he made his escape Amarinth chuckled at the aptness of his unintentional pun. She was "engaged" indeed!

His own coat secured, he hastened to the ladies' dressing-room and obtained Marie's. A minute later he and she were in a descending elevator, a minute after that in a cab speeding northward.

Arrived at Amarinth's apartment, she waited in the cab while he went up. When he returned and the cab

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was again in motion he took a small box from his pocket and opened it. It contained two rings. One was set with a single splendid stone, the other was a gold band.

"These are for you, dear," he said. "They were my mother's."

She shrank back. "Oh, don't give me those — not your mother's."

"Why not?" He stared, taken aback by her manner.

"Why — why you ought to keep them," she faltered.

There followed a moment of uncomfortable silence.

"It's a very good stone," he said at last in a hurt, disappointed tone, dropping the jeweled ring back into the box. "But, of course, if you'd rather have something different —"

"I would n't — of course, I would n't!" she cried. "I'd love that more than anything, because it was your mother's and because it means so much to you. Only — I'm afraid I'm not — worthy —"

He cut her off with a little laugh of relief and lifted the ring again from the box.

"I loved and honored my mother, dear," he said. "But not more than I shall love and honor my wife."

As he slipped the ring on her finger she shivered.

"You're cold!" he said and drew her furs closer about her throat.

The cab stopped.

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He kissed her. "Next time, you'll be my wife," he whispered.

Her face white and tense she sat beside him in the minister's study while the clergyman, whom they had found busy over his books, went up-stairs to summon his wife as a witness. The clock on the mantel ticked loudly in the stillness of the room. Neither of them spoke. Once his arm stole round her and a tremor ran through her. He searched her face anxiously but she did not meet his eyes.

"Don't look so unhappy, dear," he whispered. "If you'd rather go back—"

She started up. "Yes, yes—let's go back!"

He caught her to him. "No," he said. "No! You've given me your promise. If you love me you'll keep it. Do you love me? That's all I want to know."

"Yes." The word was a mere breath.

"Then we'll stay!"

The sound of steps descending the stairs came to them. He released her. The minister entered with his wife, who had made a hasty toilet and now smiled sleepily at them. The chauffeur was summoned from his cab as a second witness and the ceremony was performed.

The clergyman handed Marie her marriage certificate and having no pocket in her coat she passed it silently to Guy. Then the minister shook their hands, his wife kissed Marie gently, the door closed behind

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them, the cab door slammed, the chauffeur slipped into his seat, the car started.

Guy lifted his wife's hand and pressed his lips to the finger which now wore two rings.

"Your hand's like ice!" he exclaimed.

"I'm cold."

He held her close. "Was I a brute to make you see it through? I was so afraid of losing you! I was afraid you'd never give me another chance."

A short silence. Then he whispered: "Let's not go back to the dance."

"But I must! I must tell Aunt Alicia. I must tell her at once."

"Of course," he agreed after a moment. "Shall we tell everybody?"

"Oh, no, not to-night! I want Hugh to hear it first. I'm so afraid he'll be — be hurt — at the way we did it."

"No, he won't," Guy assured her confidently. "He'll understand. He's awfully human, Hugh Senior is. Seems to remember how he felt when he was young."

"Why should n't he? He's young himself yet — only thirty-eight."

"Only!"

"Well, thirty-eight is n't old for a man."

"You certainly can't call it young!"

"You certainly can't call Hugh old!" she protested.

"Why, he is n't a bit old."

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"He goes about with the old men any way. And you never see him with a girl."

"No," she conceded after a short silence, "he does n't care for girls. In the five years that I've lived in the same house with him I've never known him to call on a girl."

"And you say he's not old!"

"He is n't. It's just that he's always working."

"To-night too?"

"Oh, no. He would have come to see me dance if he had been in town. He could n't get back in time. He'll be back to-morrow morning. Oh!" she caught herself up. "I've just thought of something. That man will tell!" She pointed toward the chauffeur. "It will be in the papers and no one must know until I've told Hugh."

"That's all right—I'll fix him. Oh, here we are."

He sprang out and helped her to alight.

"Just keep still for a few days, will you?" he said to the driver, passing him a bill. "We don't want the papers to get it until the announcements are out."

"I understand, sir, thank you, sir," the man replied at once. "Good luck to you, sir." He touched his cap. "Good luck to you, Miss—Madam."

"Thanks," said Guy.

"Thank you," Marie answered, turning to smile.

The music swelled out from the ballroom to meet them as they stepped from the elevator and made their

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way to the small reception-room which they had left scarcely half an hour before. Guy took Marie's coat and scarf to the dressing-room, deposited his own, and rejoined her.

Silently they traversed the short stretch of hallway to the ballroom. As they reached the entrance a young man peering out spied them and instantly claimed Marie for the dance then in progress.

"We've already missed half of it," he reproached her.

"Then let me off for the whole of it and I'll give you the first extra. I must find Mrs. Thorley now."

The newcomer agreed reluctantly. "Mrs. Thorley is in the far ballroom. I was with her a minute ago looking for you. Don't forget now—the first extra!" he called back as he hurried away to seek another partner with whom to garner present joys.

They advanced again in silence, skirting the dancers in the first ballroom to reach the room beyond. Rounding a corner crowded with spectators, Guy suddenly felt a touch on his arm. It was Gavock.

"My dear boy, I insist that you present me to Miss Dupont at once, so that I may express to her my admiration for her charming performance this evening."

The words were delivered in the speaker's most courtly manner, a manner that had served him well on many social planes. But for all the lightness of word and manner, his small gray eyes watched intently the

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lovely face into which they smiled. Was it his fancy or had she grown pale, he wondered.

"I'm glad you liked our dance," she answered simply.

"Liked it! My dear young lady, it was superb. Where, if I may ask, did you learn to dance like that?"

"Madame Adrienne taught me, but she said I — had a natural gift."

The small tribute to herself was quoted with such a charming air of deprecation that Gavock was puzzled and he permitted himself a moment of direct scrutiny. She was undoubtedly pale. And that contraction of the pupils of her eyes meant nervous tension. His glance dropped to her hands. They were clinched tightly at her sides and the knuckles showed white. Was it a plea for silence — that lame attempt to explain her extraordinary expertness? He looked again at her face. Certainly there was no pleading there. Instead she was staring at him fixedly, her brows slightly furrowed. He waited.

"Have n't we met somewhere before, Mr. — Mr. —"

"Gavock," Amarinth supplied.

"Gavock?" She seemed to test the sound for a familiar ring.

"Met before?" Gavock, taken aback, sparred for time. So she meant to force him to take his stand then and there. She meant to know the worst at once. He could not but admire her daring.

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"I hope so," he said lightly, "but I fear not."

"But your face is so familiar!" She was still regarding him with a puzzled frown. "I'm sure that —"

"Dame Nature has just so many combinations, you know, and has to repeat herself occasionally," Gavock intervened, with a glint of warning in his glance. Could n't she let well enough alone, he thought.

But she appeared not to note the warning nor even to hear his words. Her study of his face grew more intent. Then suddenly her own face lightened. She smiled, flushed, and a low laugh gurgled in her throat.

"I remember you now," she said. "You're the man who bumped into me on Fifth Avenue this afternoon."

Amarinth started violently. Gavock gaped at her in stupefied astonishment.

"You are — I'm sure you are!" she declared laughingly. "I was getting out of the motor and you somehow stumbled and fell back against the door. And you stepped on my gown — or thought you had — and apologized in French and I did n't understand and you repeated it in English."

Amarinth had swallowed hard several times while she was speaking, and his face had reddened and then gone white. He watched Gavock, waiting for what he should say.

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The latter regained his composure with an effort. He felt the young man's challenging gaze and forcibly held his eyes on the girl.

"Oh," she murmured with a change of tone. "Perhaps I should n't have mentioned it. But it was so amusing. I did n't think you'd mind."

"He does n't mind," Guy cut in sharply. "He thought it amusing too. He told me about it at dinner. He said that when he spoke to you first in French you answered him in French. He was positive about it."

"I was mistaken," Gavock said to the girl. "In my embarrassment I misunderstood you."

"You must have. I don't speak French at all."

"But he was not only positive about the French, he was positive he had seen you before — in Europe — in Paris —"

"I was mistaken about that also," Gavock said. "Your face was very familiar — or seemed so — and I told Guy all that he says I did. But since then I have recalled the person whom you so strongly resemble. And I am sure you cannot be that person because she is dead."

"Dead!" cried Amarinth.

"Dead," repeated Gavock. "She died in Paris seven years ago."

At that moment Sybil Lowther, dancing by, stopped and called out to Gavock: "Supper is on!"

"I'm ready if you are," he answered.



An expectant hush fell on the room

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"Then you had n't forgotten your promise?" she asked.

"I had n't forgotten yours!"

Miss Lowther dismissed her partner and took Gavock's arm. He turned and murmured a word of excuse to Marie and Guy. They smiled and nodded mechanically.

"Who is this Mr. Gavock?" Marie asked, looking after him.

Guy did not answer. He was watching her with a side glance as she stared after Gavock.

"Who is he?" she repeated.

"An old friend of my father's, over here on business. He lives abroad — has lived there for twenty years — in Paris."

She turned her head and at sight of his face drew back with a startled cry.

"Why do you look at me like that?"

"Why do you look at me like that?" he returned.

His eyes seemed to bore into hers. She stared back shrinkingly a moment, then looked away. "There's Aunt Alicia," she exclaimed and started forward.

But he caught her hand and held it with a grip that made her wince.

"Wait. You can go to her afterwards. I want to — to ask you something."

Down the corridor, back to the little room which had already witnessed one chapter of their common history, he led her. Neither spoke. She tried once to

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draw her hand from the painful clutch of his fingers, but he would not release it until they were in the room, his back against the curtained doorway. Then he let her go.

She stretched the fingers discolored by his pressure and looked up at him.

"What's the matter?" she faltered.

"There's this the matter," he replied slowly. "I've got to know where you and Roger Gavock met before. I've got to know!"

"Why, we've never met! I saw him this afternoon —"

"I don't mean that. I mean before."

"We've never met before."

"Will you swear that on your honor?"

"Guy! Don't look at me like that! Why should I swear? I tell you that I never saw Mr. Gavock until this afternoon. Isn't my word enough? What do you mean? What are you thinking of? I don't understand."

"I've got to know the truth about this thing, Marie. You're my wife and I've got to know. Mr. Gavock told me that he had seen you before, that he could n't be mistaken about it — could n't be."

"But he said just now that he was. He said that the person he took me for is dead, that she died in Paris seven — Ah!"

She ended with a sharp cry as of sudden enlightenment.

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"What's the matter? What is it?" he demanded.

She stared at him a moment, wild-eyed. "Who did he tell you he thought I was?" she gasped out.

"He did n't tell me — he could n't remember."

"But he told you something, something that — horrified you!"

He was silent.

She caught her breath and began to measure the brief length of the room with nervous steps, clasping and unclasping her hands. His eyes followed her but he did not speak.

"Listen," she said abruptly, pausing before him. "There is something I ought to have told you before I married you. It was wrong of me not to speak but — but I love you — and I was afraid — I did n't know what you would think — I was afraid of losing you."

She threw out her arms in a tragic gesture of appeal but he recoiled from her, his face set in a mask of horror.

"Don't look at me like that!" she begged. "I tried to be honest with you — I put you off months and months, you know I did! I knew I should have to tell you, and I — Then to-night when you urged me so — and you had the license — I thought that if I told you afterwards —"

She broke into a piteous moan.

"Told me what?" he asked in a hard voice.

"Oh, Guy, don't speak to me like that. You said you loved me. You said you loved me more than any-

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thing else in the world. You've just promised to love and protect me all my life. Why, we're married — I'm your wife! Don't look at me like that!"

"Told me what?" he repeated grimly.

She shrank together at his tone. Her own face hardened.

"There is some one who can tell you better than I can what — there is to tell. Ask Hugh."

"Hugh Senior! What can he tell me about you that you can't tell me yourself?"

"Go to him to-morrow morning —"

"No! You've got to tell me yourself to-night — now."

She shook her head. "Go to him."

"Then I'll go to-night."

"He is n't in town. Go to-morrow morning, to his office. I'll tell him you're coming."

"To-morrow — to-morrow —"

He jerked out the words, staring ahead unseeingly, as thoughts raced through his mind.

"You are my wife," he said suddenly. "I promised to protect you — as you just reminded me — and I will. Will you obey me — as you promised?"

"I will do anything you say."

"Then you are to tell no one of our marriage, not even Mrs. Thorley. And you are not to tell Hugh Senior — above all. Do you promise?"

She hesitated. "I don't understand," she murmured doubtfully.

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"Never mind that. You promised to obey."

"I won't tell him. I won't tell any one."

"Tell them that I've asked you to marry me, that's all."

She nodded, her white, drawn face raised to his. "You don't love me," she said slowly and with tragic conviction. "I know it now. You never loved me."

The stricken look in her eyes moved him at last. Impetuously he swept her into his arms.

"I do love you! Marie, tell me that it is n't anything that could separate us."

She shivered. "I don't know. I don't know what could separate us," she answered dully.

"It could n't be that — it could n't be! Marie, tell me what it is. I can't stand the suspense. I love you. Don't you see that I'm only asking what any man has a right to know about his wife?"

She drew herself away from his embrace. "I must go to my aunt. I want to go home."

Home! The word struck painfully on his ears. She was his wife, her home was with him. Silently he followed her down the corridor.

"I'm going to the dressing-room for my coat," she said without looking at him. "Please tell my aunt to meet me there, that I want to go home — to leave here."

He winced at her stammering avoidance of the painful word and mumbled an assent. Then she turned and hurried away.

Mrs. Thorley was in the ballroom and at his message

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her eyebrows lifted ever so slightly above her world-weary eyes, but she made no comment, thanked him smilingly, and walked off at once with an elderly man with whom she had been conversing.

Amarinth made his way to the supper-room. From the doorway he located Gavock and Sybil Lowther at a distant table and turned frowningly away again.

"I'll get the truth if I have to choke it out of him," he promised himself. "He was lying to-night — lying!"

CHAPTER VII

MRS. THORLEY sank back against the cushions of her limousine with a sigh of relief. She had reached the age when late hours and the lights and noises of festivity always tired her, but to-night her nerves had been strained not by fatigue alone but by anxiety. Silently she watched the face of the girl beside her as the street lamps and flashes from passing motors threw it into view. Twice she opened her lips to speak and twice reconsidered the impulse. A worried frown deepened between her brows.

Suddenly, shivering in the raw, midnight air, she gave an ineffectual tug at the fur robe that lay across her knees. The movement roused her companion and two young arms came to her assistance.

"Thank you, my dear."

Then after a short silence Mrs. Thorley spoke again. "Who taught you that dance, Marie?"

"Why, Madame Adrienne, of course."

Mrs. Thorley hesitated. "I wondered about it," she said at last, "because I happened to hear Miss Lowther telling some one that Madame Adrienne had not taught it to you and that Madame thought you had had lessons before you came to her."

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The girl's shoulders shot up impatiently. "Sybil Lowther is always horrid about other people doing things well."

"I see," Mrs. Thorley murmured. "And is this the dance you are planning to do at the carnival next month?"

"Yes."

"You must n't. You do it too well."

"Aunt Alicia!"

"My dear child, think a moment. Think how it must seem to people who don't understand. Miss Lowther's remark was a straw in the wind. Nothing could be more unfortunate than to start — conjecture. So far we have managed to escape it."

To this Marie for several moments said nothing, but her short, quick breathing broke the stillness. Of a sudden she spoke.

"Mr. Amarinth asked me to marry him to-night."

Mrs. Thorley started slightly. "Well?" she said.

"He's going to see Hugh in the morning."

There was a pause.

"Aunt Alicia, will it make a difference to him? Do you think it will — do you?"

On the eager pleading the answer followed reluctantly. "I don't know — I don't know. Will you mind so very much if it does?"

"I shall mind terribly — terribly!"

The car slid smoothly round a corner and stopped. Marie sprang out.

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"Hugh must be back," she exclaimed, turning to assist Mrs. Thorley. "There's a light in the library."

"He said he might return to-night, you know."

"I hope he has — I hope he has."

"Let me speak to him first," Mrs. Thorley said when they were inside the house, detaining Marie who was starting impulsively for the library door. "There are several matters I must see him about and I'm rather tired. I'll let you know when I come upstairs."

Marie acquiesced doubtfully and turned toward the steps.

"Don't change your gown. I won't be long and I want him to see it," Mrs. Thorley looked back to say before opening the library door.

When the door closed again after her, Marie lingered at the foot of the steps as though undecided as to what to do. She made a sudden, impetuous movement toward the library, then with a change of purpose, wheeled and ran lightly up the stairs.

Hugh Senior started up from a deep arm-chair before the fire at the sound of the door opening. "I must have dozed," he said, advancing to meet his aunt. "Where's Marie?"

"Up-stairs. She'll be down later," Mrs. Thorley replied, letting her fur mantle slip into his arms. "She has something to tell you."

"Something to tell me?" he echoed in sharp inquiry.

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"Guy Amarinth has asked her to marry him."

"Amarinth!"

"Does it surprise you? Surely you know she has been seeing a great deal of him lately."

"She sees other men too. Somehow I did n't think of singling him out. Has she accepted him?"

"She has sent him to you."

"Ah, I see!"

He walked back to the fire and Mrs. Thorley dropped wearily into the chair he had relinquished.

In spite of the difference in age and sex the two were plainly of the same family. A long, rather narrow face with deep-set, gray eyes, a fine straight nose and square, clean-cut jaw were common to both, and in her had lost little of their forceful character through feminization and sagging muscles. Both were tall and sparely fleshed; in bodily movement quick and purposeful; of strong passions, which in her were tempered by time and experience, in him, merely curbed.

"Oh, Hugh," she exclaimed with a touch of impatience, "why have you let it come to this?"

He stared, not understanding.

"My dear boy, I'm not blind. Don't you suppose I know that you worship the ground she walks on?"

His face reddened swiftly and he dropped his eyes to the fire. For a few moments there was silence. "I'm thirty-eight," he said at last. "She is twenty-four."

"She may be older."

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He shook his head. "She could n't have been more than seventeen, and that was hardly seven years ago — just seven in April."

"Well, what of it? Thirty-eight is young, and you're a very attractive man, Hugh."

"She does n't seem to have noticed it."

"Of course not! Your attitude toward her has always been so paternal."

"My dear aunt, can I never make you understand how I feel about Marie? What you have done for her you did because it promised you — entertainment."

"Hugh, that's unfair!"

"Not wholly that, I'll admit, but at any rate you looked upon it as an interesting experiment. The unusualness of the case appealed to your imagination. You liked the idea of doing what few women would have done in your place, and that was partly why you did it."

"I was sorry for the child."

"Of course. I don't mean to imply that your motive was entirely selfish and I don't underrate the help you've been to me. My problem would have been exceedingly difficult without you. All I mean is this, that while you would, in any case, have been generous — with money — you would have been generous at a safe distance if Marie had not happened to be the charming, adorable creature she was."

Mrs. Thorley gave a little snort of indignation. "My dear Hugh, may I inquire how *near* a problem

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she would have been to you if you had not happened to fall in love with her? ”

“ That ’s just the point I ’m trying to make, Aunt Alicia. My feeling for Marie has never had anything to do with my sense of responsibility toward her. I was responsible for her condition. I had wrenched her from her niche in life and could n’t put her back. I had to find some other for her. You can never know how much the matter troubled me during her first year in England. When you wrote the following summer that you had decided to keep her with you I could have kissed your feet in relief and gratitude.”

Hugh’s voice as he ended was slightly husky and he turned his face from his aunt’s gaze.

Mrs. Thorley sighed. “ My dear boy, if you had only let her see how much you care.”

“ I could n’t,” he said after a moment. “ Don’t you see? I owe her happiness. She has such an exaggerated idea of her obligation to us that she was capable of marrying me out of sheer gratitude. I could n’t let her do that, could I? If Amarinth can make her happy —”

“ He won’t marry her.”

“ Why do you say that? ”

Mrs. Thorley looked up with a hopeful gleam in her tired eyes. “ You don’t mean to tell him then? ” she asked.

“ Not tell him! I must tell him.”

“ Why? ”

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Hugh Senior studied his companion's face in perplexed astonishment. "I could n't let him marry her without knowing," he said slowly, but with a hint of uncertainty, as though the course he declared impossible yet tempted him.

She was quick to press the advantage, as she saw it.

"He won't marry her if he knows," she said. "You say you owe her happiness. Tell him and you'll rob her of her chance of it."

He turned and strode the length of the room and back. She watched him eagerly.

"She loves him, Hugh," she pleaded again. "She asked me if I thought it would make a difference to him and I asked if she would mind very much if it did, and she said: 'Terribly!' If you had seen her face, heard her voice—"

"She would be the last to wish to deceive the man she loves."

"But it's quixotic! Do you know another girl as charming, as lovable? Another with as much in herself to give a man?"

"No, and if Amarinth really cares for her—"

"He'll be revolted. There'll come a sense of strangeness between them. We had it ourselves, you know."

He nodded, frowning anxiously.

"It's an old story to us, but will come as a shock to him. He won't marry her."

"Yes, he will. I'll make him see it as we do."

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"Don't tell him. Let her tell him after they are married."

"I can't do that. It would n't be fair to him."

"To him! And you love her! Oh, you men, you men!" She rose impatiently. "Is one of you ever fair to a woman?"

He did not answer.

"Well," she said with a sigh, "we've given her a life as happy as a girl could have for six years. After all, that's as much as she has a right to expect, I dare say."

He winced. "If she has sent him to me it is because she wishes me to tell him the truth."

"Oh, tell him, tell him!" she retorted hotly. "Your story coupled with the talk he must have heard to-night about her dancing—" She shrugged hopelessly. "Poor child."

"Talk? What do you mean?"

"I mean that she danced too well. There was talk. I heard one remark and there must have been others. I told you, you remember, when she took up this dancing that she must have had lessons before. Now I'm sure of it. Her performance to-night was so extraordinary that only one explanation is possible."

"Surely you exaggerate."

"No. I've seen the greatest dancers of two generations. I know. The girl is a dancer—a trained dancer. Fortunately most of the people there were too dull, too uneducated in such matters, to appreciate

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her performance. Even so, she aroused comment. I have forbidden her to repeat it but I wish you had seen it. You'll see her gown at any rate, though you probably won't realize its significance. She planned it herself."

"A trained dancer!" Hugh exclaimed, staring at his aunt.

"European at that. It does n't suggest pleasant things, Hugh."

"It's incredible."

"Guy Amarinth may not find it so." She took up her cloak from the chair where it lay and turned toward the door. "I suppose there is nothing I can say to move you." She paused a moment. "You mean to tell him?"

He was silent.

"Good night then. She wants to speak to you. I'll send her down."

He went over to her and bending kissed her on the cheek. "Good night," he said gently. "I wish I could see things differently, if only for your sake."

"Oh, don't consider me! Think of her!"

When she was gone he began nervously to pace the floor, stopping at every turn to listen for the step he awaited. At last he heard it, tapping lightly down the stairs. The door opened and she came in.

She was still wearing the gown in which she had danced, but the low table lamps left her head and shoulders in shadow. In spite of that, however, he

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noted at once the change in her. And the sight of her face, white and drawn as he had never seen it, stabbed him unbearably.

His glance sank to her dress. Dimmed though its flame-like radiance was in the soft, shaded light, it yet stood out from the dark, book-lined walls like a flamboyant poster. And on his mind, filled with disquieting conjectures, it struck a note so garish, so unpleasant, that involuntarily he turned his head away. And it was she who first spoke.

"Did Aunt Alicia tell you?"

"Yes."

"That he will come to see you to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Did she ask you not to tell him?"

He nodded an assent.

"She thinks he will mind then." She drew a deep breath. "What will you do?"

"What do you wish me to do, Marie?"

"You must tell him!"

She came close to him and looked intently into his eyes as though trying to read his thoughts. He gazed back, waiting. Her manner seemed strange to him; she herself seemed strange and remote.

"I wonder if you don't know more about me than you have ever told me?" she said suddenly.

He gave her a swift glance. "Why?" he questioned sharply.

She replied with a characteristic shrug, her eyes

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still on his. "I feel it," she said. "But, listen. You must tell him everything — everything you know."

"What would you do if I were to decide to tell him nothing?"

"I should tell him myself."

"I knew it!" He gave a deep sigh of relief and his tense face relaxed. "I knew that you would not want to buy happiness with a lie."

"I can't," she answered. "I know that — now." Her lip quivered with a sudden access of feeling and she turned her face away.

"Do you care so much for him?" he cried out in jealous misery.

She hid her face in her hands and her shoulders shook with dry sobs.

Impulsively he started toward her, but stopped. The sight of her suffering hurt him unbearably, his arms ached to hold and shield her, but the very strength of his feeling kept him rigid. He was afraid of betraying himself, knowing that should he do so she would only shrink from him. It was not his arms she wanted. Nothing now lay in his power to do for her but the one thing: he must make Amaranth see!

But it was not in Hugh's nature to stand inactive for long. He stirred restlessly. "Don't — don't," he begged.

At that she wheeled and thrust out her arms imploringly.

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"Whatever happens, you won't desert me, will you — whatever happens?"

"Of course not! What are you thinking of, child? This will always be your home."

"Home! I have no home."

"Marie!"

"I owe everything in the world to you — you and Aunt Alicia —"

"You owe us nothing," he put in. "All we have done, all we can ever do, will not compensate for the injury I did you. You owe us nothing."

"Yes, everything," she insisted. "These years of happiness, of care and affection that never failed, friends, and this beautiful home and clothes — everything. Everything I have you've given me — even my name."

A tremor shook her but she went on. "You won't think I'm ungrateful, will you? No matter what happens, you won't ever think that? I could n't bear it."

"My dear child, what is the matter?"

"I could n't bear it if you thought me ungrateful. I'm not, Hugh, I'm not! That's what I wanted to say to you. You do believe it, don't you?"

"Of course."

"That's all then. Good night." She turned and hurried toward the door.

"Marie, come back. Tell me what is troubling you."

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"You 'll know — soon," she said, and the next moment the door closed after her.

Two strides and he had jerked it open. But already she was at the foot of the stairs. He started to follow, then stopped short and remained motionless, listening to her hurrying steps until a door closed above and he heard them no more. Then he turned and crossed and recrossed the room in anxious thought.

What was the matter? What had she meant? What was it he would know soon? Why had she been so pathetically eager to convince him of her gratitude? He questioned himself again and again but found no answers. Vague forebodings assailed him that as his thoughts coursed backward through the years seemed rooted in the very beginnings of his acquaintance with the girl.

But surmises were worse than folly. To-morrow Amarinth would come. He must be ready. He must not fail her in the one way that he might serve.

He passed into a smaller room adjoining the library and switched on the light. This was his study, where he isolated himself for home work. Crossing to a chest of drawers he fitted a key into the lock of one and opened it. Behind papers and packages of various kinds he slipped his hand and drew out a long, narrow box. This he placed on a table and took off the lid. Inside lay an object wrapped in several folds of tissue paper which he lifted out carelessly and dropped

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into his coat pocket. Then he stood staring down at the thing that remained in the box, a knife with a rudely carved bone handle, the blade long and evil looking.

What was it she had said? "You must tell him everything — everything you know."

For a long time he remained thus, his eyes fastened upon the dirk lying in the box. Then suddenly his lips closed tightly as on an ultimate decision and replacing its cover he shoved the box far back again in the drawer from which he had taken it, after which he locked the drawer.

Switching out the lights, he returned to the library and there also extinguished the light. As he slowly mounted the stairs to his bedroom he looked at his watch. It was two o'clock.

CHAPTER VIII

COUNT EGON SZEMERE laid down his pen as he neared the bottom of the page and read what he had written.

Nadeshda, beloved:

I love thee! The words leap from pen to paper as would they from my lips to thine ear wert thou but here to harken. Believe. Doubt it never, heart of my heart. The ink will dry, and crumble on this pen but the spring of my passion for thee is deep as the seas which sweep between us.

I close my eyes, beloved, and the seas are no more. In thy garden the fountain spray sparkles under the white moon, our lips touch, our hearts meet. I raise my eyelids and again life is but a waste of dead leaves tossed by a wanton wind.

Now, nearly seven years has the Tartar woman wreaked her vengeance on me because that the Cross of Kemesvar shames not her shriveled bosom. Is time, then, to steal youth from our blood and from our brows ere I again behold thee?

It shall not be! The durance of all things is seven years. Harken! In the holy crypt of Szemeresezeg, hewn in the stone by the sacred sword of the first of my fathers, it stands written:

"Until summers three and four shall the fields thirst, until winters four and three shall the wolves howl, then no more forever."

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The page slipped from Count Egon's hand to the table. Slowly he rose to his feet. His swarthy face was strained and set. Solemnly he lifted his right hand and made the sign of the cross.

"Until summers three and four shall our hearts thirst, until winters four and three shall the Tartar howl — then no more forever! By the sword of the first of my fathers it is sworn."

Spoken aloud, in his guttural Slavic tongue, the oath to an understanding ear would have seemed weirdly incongruous, mingling as it did with the whirring and scurrying of automobiles, the grind and clang of an occasional trolley car, and other late night noises of Broadway.

Through the final word, spoken with intense solemnity, shrilled the telephone bell.

Count Szemere started violently and stared about the room, still unconscious of the cause of his disturbance. The bell rang again. He hurried to the instrument and answered, listened a moment to a message, then said: "That he mount immediately."

Hanging up the receiver he returned to his place at the writing-table and added to his letter the few lines:

Only believe and trust, Nadeshda mine. Until we meet
and always,

Thine only,
EGON.

Quickly inserting the closely written sheet within an envelope he addressed it:

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To the High and Nobly Born,
The Countess Belcredi-Csorna,
Castle Csorna, Bucharest, Rumania.

This finished, he rose and stood motionless in an attitude of listening.

A knock struck sharply on the door. He sprang forward and opened and a man entered. With a cry of affectionate welcome Egon threw himself upon his breast.

“Louis!”

Count Louis Szemere was some ten years his cousin's senior. Strikingly resembling him at a first glance, at a second he revealed points of wide divergence of temperament. Racial and family characteristics they shared: the same swarthy complexion, wiry black hair, and bristling black mustache; the same narrow eyes under thick brows, the same low forehead and high cheekbones, and in figure both were short and compactly built. But, whereas Egon's countenance mirrored his thoughts, Louis' served him as a mask.

The embrace was returned in silence, then releasing himself Louis asked in the language of their country: “Is it ready?”

Egon caught up his letter from the writing-table and held it out.

“Behold!”

Louis took it from him and carefully placed it in a leather wallet, which in turn he slipped into an inner

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pocket of his coat, his young kinsman following his movements with a tense face.

"In eighteen days you will be again at Csorna — you will see her. Oh, my God, my God!" With a cry of despair he sank into a chair and broke into wild weeping.

Louis looked on with unmoved countenance.

"Your fate is hard, my cousin. I have done what I could. The police of all Europe still seek."

Egon raised his head. "There has been no word, no clue?"

"None."

"And the Tartar hag will live forever!" Again he dropped his head into his hands, but his anguish now was mute.

"One thing has been learned, but it leads nowhere," said Louis. "Andrus is in this country, in New York. He lives here like a rat, hiding among rats."

With another swift change of mood Egon Szemere sprang up.

"He knows nothing, this Andrus, nothing!" he declared impatiently. "Have I not said it ever? You cut off his hand — his brush hand. WELL? Did he speak?"

"The Cross of Kemesvar will buy many brush hands," Louis returned calmly.

"Tscha!" Egon grunted contemptuously. "He was an artist. Had he not won a first at the Salon?"

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Glory already beckoned him. For all the jewels of the earth he would not have sold his right hand!"

"An artist is still a man. He loved."

"An artist is first an artist — and the woman was dead."

"That was never proved," said Louis.

"Tscha!"

"The man was acquitted."

"Tscha!"

"He too is in this city — but that you know."

"Yes, that I know. Also I know that she is dead." He began a restless pacing of the floor. "Speak of it no more, I beg."

"Louis!" he broke out, halting suddenly. "What God rules us that in an instant, without thought or reason, we hurl ourselves to hell? On a breath — like a devil's whisper — the name of that accursed place floated to my ear that night. The Prince was bored, swore he would go nowhere he had been before — the women were worn out jades, he said. Was Paris then no longer Paris? Did one jingle one's gold in vain? *Le Pigeon Pourpre!* Again through the music and the clatter — from where I knew not — the name struck on my ear. This time I caught at it. 'What is it then, this *Pigeon Pourpre?*' I asked the waiter — My God! Better for me had my tongue been cut from my throat!"

"Silence, Egon!" commanded Count Louis sternly.

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"You but torture yourself uselessly. Why relive the past?"

"What else is left for me then?" Egon returned bitterly. "You spend your days in the house of your fathers, your sons measure their strength beside you in the hunt. You are a man and the father of men. What am I? The slave of a weak man and a vile woman — no present, no future — only the past, the damned past."

Then again, with the swift change of mood that was characteristic of him, he went on: "But to-day, Louis, I have a feeling that the end is near. Tell me, does Vasilief ever speak of me?"

Louis shook his head. "He has no will but hers."

"Then deliverance will come another way. How, I do not know, but it will come. I feel it here." He struck his breast with his clenched fist. "Deep within me hope springs again." He hesitated, his eyes on his kinsman's face. "In April, Louis, the seven years will end. Do you recall the sword-cut words in the holy crypt at —"

A contemptuous laugh broke from Louis Szemere.

"You are mad, Egon — that is but a witch's tale."

"The words are there!" Egon insisted hotly, reddening at the taunt. "They are there, cut by a man of men — the first of our fathers. He swore an oath and it was so. And I —" He paused a moment, then raised his right hand above his head, his narrow, black

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eyes glittering, and said: "I too have sworn an oath!"

For a while his hearer remained silent, watching the fierce, rapt face. Abruptly he spoke.

"Listen, Egon. What do you hear?" he asked, jerking his head toward the windows. "Cars that slide along tracks of steel, carriages that need no horses — sounds that would have struck strangely on the ear of our first ancestor. Come back to the present and to reason. Madness lies at the end of the road you travel — nothing else."

"Perhaps," Egon answered slowly. "The founder of our house knew nothing of modern wonders, as you say. But when he swore an oath it came to pass. Is it not so?"

Louis shrugged his heavy shoulders. "You return to Washington to-morrow?" he asked, rising to end the conversation.

"Yes."

"I will leave you now. It is already late and my steamer sails at daybreak." He placed his hands affectionately upon his kinsman's shoulders. "My heart is very heavy for you, Egon. What is in my power to do to serve you I do, and will ever do. Farewell."

"Farewell," Egon replied. "You will greet my cousins in my name. For the rest — I have written." He gestured toward the pocket in which his letter rested.

There was a pause.

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"She is lovelier even than you knew her, Egon," Count Louis said.

Egon's chest heaved with a quick, hard breath, but no reply came.

The cousins embraced silently, then silently facing one another each made the sign of the cross. Count Louis walked to the door, opened it, and without looking back went out and closed it after him.

The traveling clock on the writing-table struck twice.

CHAPTER IX

TWO o'clock.

Irma Niklova paused half way up the fourth steep flight of tenement stairs and listened to the two deep notes that boomed softly from a distant tower. She was panting from the exertion of the long climb and her thin, bloodless face was blue with cold, but in spite of discomfort and fatigue her senses quickened at the beauty of the tones that spread their resonance through the silent night.

With an effort she dragged herself to the top of the stairs and felt her way down the narrow, unlit hall to a door from which, through a wide crack at the sill, a dim ray of light escaped to lose itself almost instantly in the darkness. At the door she listened a moment, then turned the knob noiselessly, and went in. Noiselessly she closed the door again while her glance swept the room.

On a bed in one corner lay a boy of perhaps fifteen or so. His form was huddled beneath the coverings, only the wasted face and black, unkempt hair were visible. He was asleep and his short, feverish breathing alone broke the stillness.

Near by, at a table, sat a man, also asleep, his face pressed down upon his right arm. This arm, stretched

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out across the table, ended in the empty cuff of the gray, knitted sweater which he wore. The hand was missing. The left arm hung limply to the floor and near it lay a drawing pencil where it had dropped from his inert fingers. A drawing-board lay on his knee.

Irma Niklova stood motionless. So close was she to the man that she could have touched him. A tremor shook her slender body and her somber black eyes warmed and softened as they rested on the fair, disheveled head and half-hidden face. Presently she stooped and without a sound placed her violin case on the floor against the wall, then, rising, she slipped her right hand from its rough woolen glove and timidly extended it. Instantly she drew it back. A moment's hesitation, then a soundless step and, holding her breath, she bent her lips to the head of the unconscious man.

He started up and the drawing-board clattered from his knees to the floor. She sprang back, her face white. He turned and blinked at her in a daze.

"Miss Niklova! I did n't hear you come in. Was I asleep?"

She turned her face from his gaze and put a quick finger on her lips. "Sh!"

The sick boy had stirred at the noise of the falling board, but while his sister waited in silence he sank back again into the depths of slumber. She touched his hot forehead cautiously, then felt beneath the covering for his pulse. Relief dawned in her face.

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"He seems better," she whispered to the man.

He nodded.

She beckoned him to follow her into the hall and there they talked in low tones. The doctor had not come, the man said, but Pavlo had taken the medicine and had slept; assuredly he was better.

"You must go to bed," she said, when the report was ended. "You are very tired. Never, never, can I thank you for all you do for us, Mr. Andrus."

"What I do for you you would as gladly do for me, Miss Niklova. We are comrades. It is understood that we help one another."

Returning to the room he picked up his fallen sketch and pencil. "If there is anything I can do, you will call me?" he asked, rejoining her in the hall. "You promise?"

She nodded with a smile so warm and tender that it almost beautified her. "I'll call you — I promise." Hesitating, she added timidly: "Don't work any more to-night, you look so tired."

He smiled — a smile that brought no light to his eyes — and turning left her.

In the doorway she waited, looking after him until his head had vanished above the stair railing.

Back in her room she busied herself reviving the meager fire in the grate, then in a smaller room adjoining she partly undressed, slipped on her long outdoor coat and returning to the sickroom she lowered the light. Before the icon which filled one corner of the

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room she knelt a long time in prayer, then stretched herself upon a sofa near her brother's bed, and at once fell into a light, restless sleep.

Barely an hour had passed.

Irma Niklova found herself standing at her brother's bedside. What had awakened her, she wondered, startled. Had he called out or moved? He lay exactly as before, but now his breath came in short gasps; his skin looked waxen, his lips blue.

Tremblingly she felt his wrist. A cry broke from her. Quickly, with shaking hands, she measured out some medicine and poured it into the lips of the sick boy. He half started up, gulping the liquid. She held her finger on his pulse and waited.

At the end of ten minutes she noticed a change. The pulse was stronger, the breath came more slowly. A moment longer she lingered, then threw open the door, and guided by the scant light from the room ran swiftly down the hall and up the stairs to the floor above.

At John Andrus' door she knocked. No answer came. Again she knocked, one hand on the knob. Silence. Then, unconsciously, her hand pressed the knob, the door yielded, and she lurched into the room.

The sight that met her eyes held her rigid in the stupor of surprise.

The room was like her own in size and contour, its furnishings were even sparser — the barest necessities — and in a corner stacks of canvases faced the wall.

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The thought of these canvases and the human tragedy they stood for had often stabbed her heart. She had seen them all and knew too well what painful witness they bore to hours of hopeless struggle.

Early in her acquaintance with her American neighbor — begun by a service he had rendered her young brother — he had told her that while working as a student in Paris he had met with an accident which had resulted in the amputation of his right hand. Hurling into an abyss of despair he had at length emerged with the resolve to conquer fate, to train the left hand as he had trained the right.

Stubbornly he had labored until able to maintain himself by commercial drawing. Just so much of the distasteful work he now did as sufficed to keep life in his body and the body housed. Beyond that his time was spent on these canvases. Inch by inch, stroke by stroke, he had trained his inept muscles. Months, years, had gone by and still the conception of his brain and the execution of his hand lay worlds apart.

But it was not the tragic futility of this struggle that now riveted the Russian girl's attention. Nor was it the man himself, who, seated with head sunk and eyes vacant in the apathy of despair, had heard neither her knock nor her step. It was the canvas on the easel before him that held her transfixed with astonishment.

It was the life-size portrait of a woman.

The shade had been removed from the oil lamp on the table behind Andrus and the light streaming over

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the vivid colors of the short dancing dress seemed to rebound from the jots of paint like flecks of fire. The figure was poised on the toes, the arms outstretched in the full sweep of movement. Dark, lustrous hair hugged the small head, closely framing the young, glowing face, high set on a slender throat bare of all ornament.

“Miss Dupont!”

Irma Niklova gasped the name and at the sound Andrus rose with a nervous start.

“Why — why — what’s the matter?” he stammered, like a man rudely awakened from deep sleep.

She pulled herself together with an effort. “I knocked. You did n’t answer. I thought you were asleep. Pavlo is worse. Will you go for the doctor?”

“Of course.”

He caught up a coat from a chair and put it on and reached for a hat that lay on the table. Turning back to her he followed her eyes to the canvas, and for several moments they stood in silence, gazing at the brilliant figure of the dancer.

At last he spoke. “I painted that.”

“You!”

He laughed shortly. “I had a hand then that obeyed me. That was the last thing I did before —”

He was so near her that she felt the sharp contraction of his form which finished the sentence. An exclamation of pain and horror broke from her, a cry that



"Marie Dupont!" she gasped

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was more than mere pity for human woe. It was the revolt of an artist at the tragedy of an artist's soul.

"Come. I will go for the doctor."

He bent and turned down the lamp, but Irma Niklova did not move.

"That is a portrait," she said. "Who is it?"

A pause. The room was dim and shadowy now, and as before they stood together staring at the radiant form that seemed to draw to itself what little light the lamp gave out.

"She was a dancer," he said at last in a low tone.

"I knew her in Paris — years ago."

"A dancer — for the public?"

He nodded.

"What is her name?"

"She has none — she is dead."

"Dead!"

He shuddered. "I loved her and she is dead," he said, and striding to the door he jerked it open.

"Come, we must hurry."

She staggered blindly after him into the dark hall.

CHAPTER X

“ONE — two — three — four — five.”

Guy Amarinth sank back to his pillow with a groan of impatience. Only five o'clock! And he could not hope to see Hugh Senior until ten, since the latter would probably not reach his office before then — it might be even later. Five hours! And nothing to do in the meantime but think.

If he could only sleep! But his mind worked on as relentlessly as a machine, and, like a machine, following always the same course, reaching the same conclusions.

He had left the Esplanade soon after his glimpse of Gavock in the supper-room with Miss Lowther. His intention at first had been to wait, accompany Gavock home, and somehow wring the truth from him. But while waiting, saner counsel had come. To force an interview at such an hour would only inform Gavock of the seriousness of the issue and so close his lips the more effectually. He had said he would lie should the occasion arise, and he had lied. There was nothing to be gained by a talk with him. It would be better to hear first what Hugh Senior had to tell him.

What could that be? His conjecturing clung tena-

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ciously to the course on which it had been started by his after-dinner talk with Gavock, for he was not possessed with an active imagination. But he knew it, and the one ray of light amid the darkness of surmise was the chance that Hugh Senior's revelation would be something no guessing of his could ever have hit upon.

Would Marie keep her promise and conceal the fact of their marriage? That question he put to himself repeatedly. If she should tell, would not Hugh Senior, like Gavock, lie to protect her? A horror of being kept in the dark obsessed Guy. He had told Gavock that he wanted no fool's paradise, nor did he. He wanted the truth at any cost.

Just what the reckoning might come to at the highest, he did not allow himself to calculate; but in their troubled wanderings his thoughts glanced off the question again and again. After all, as it stood now, the marriage was legally annulable —

But from that way of escape for himself he was turned back by the memory of an anguished face and tremulous words: "I love you — I was afraid of losing you."

It was barely ten o'clock when he presented himself at Hugh Senior's office. To his relief he was admitted at once and as he entered he was conscious of the sharp glance of appraisal that the older man turned upon him during their brief greetings. The two had met a dozen times, but not until now had they had oc-

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casion to take stock of one another's quality or mental bias. "Will he lie to me?" Amarinth asked himself.

"How will he take it?" Hugh Senior wondered.

"Just what has Marie told you about herself?"

"Nothing."

Amarinth had taken the seat to which a handwave had invited him. It stood close to the desk at which he had found Hugh at work.

"I see. Well, she has asked me to tell you what I know of her; but before I do so I must request your assurance as a man of honor that what I say shall be held in strictest confidence. As I understand the situation, you have made an offer of marriage to my ward — Miss Dupont, that is — and she has given you no answer. When you leave here you will be at liberty honorably to advance or retreat — as you may desire. Am I right?"

A dull flush mounted in Amarinth's face, and he gave a short nod in sign of assent.

"And I have your word of honor as to your silence in the event of your withdrawal?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you. Of course, if you should decide to press your suit and are accepted by Miss Dupont, her story becomes your property — to do with as you and she see fit. In that case you can rely on my silence and that of my aunt."

"I understand."

The color had waned in Amarinth's face at this

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formal preface, and he set his teeth and stiffened his body as though to resist a shock. Noting this Hugh sought to reassure him.

"I don't wish to alarm you, Amarinth. Frankly, I have no idea how the story will strike you. I have never before told it to any one except persons whose professional advice I wanted."

He opened a desk drawer and took out the package wrapped in tissue paper which he had the night before removed from the cabinet in his study. He laid it on the desk and settling himself again in his chair began.

"Seven years ago next month I made a business trip to London. From there I went over to Paris for a short stay with my aunt, Mrs. Thorley, who had recently become a widow and had turned over her affairs to me. She was living in the country about three hours by motor from Paris. The day after my arrival I drove her car into the city, dined with friends there, and went to the theater. On my return to the hotel where I was to spend the night I found a cable from New York informing me that a case in which I was deeply interested was to come up for trial a month earlier than I had expected and that postponement was not advisable. Finding that there was a boat leaving Cherbourg on the following day which would put me in New York in time, I had no choice but to take it. It was, however, absolutely necessary to finish up my aunt's business before leaving, so I decided to motor back early in the morning, see her, and then rush on

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by motor to Cherbourg. It was barely daylight when I left my hotel. Do you know Paris well?"

"Hardly at all."

"Then I won't bore you with street names. The faint streak of light in the east gave me my general direction and the streets being at that hour practically deserted I made good progress. I had crossed the river and got into the old part of the city where the streets are all narrow and wind and twist unexpectedly. Suddenly as I was nearing a sharp bend a woman darted from around a corner and ran across my course. I shouted: 'Look out!' and made an effort to swing the car aside, but I struck her and she fell, thrown, fortunately, out of the path of the car. I stopped and ran to her. She was unconscious but alive and as far as I could judge not much hurt — had fainted from fright, I thought, and was probably only bruised. I poured some whisky down her throat and that started her pulse a bit, but did not rouse her. So I looked about for help, wondering what I'd better do."

Hugh paused. His thin, strong hands were tightly clasped before him on the desk ledge and his eyes frowned fixedly upon them as he spoke. Now he looked up at Guy.

"You know those queer, half-moon streets that begin and end on acute angles in the oldest sections of Paris? Well, this was such a scrap of a street. Small shops lined it on both sides, their windows closed with solid shutters. There was no sign of a waking

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creature anywhere. I called loudly. No one answered. The only thing to do apparently was to get the girl to a hospital —”

“The girl!”

“Yes — it was Marie. She was just a slip of a girl, sixteen or seventeen, at most. I carried her to the car and placed her in the tonneau. It was then my intention to ask the first person I met the way to the nearest hospital; but, as I started off, recollections of the experiences of foreigners in such cases occurred to me and I foresaw myself dragging out the day explaining or trying to explain the accident to the hospital authorities, and being probably passed on by them to the police. It would certainly mean missing my boat and that I was determined not to do. As the girl’s condition was not alarming I decided that it would be safe to take her on to my aunt’s place, where she would have every care. Of course, had I thought there would be the slightest risk to her in delay, I should have taken my chances at the hospital. I stopped frequently to assure myself that she was not growing weaker and once I noticed a spot of blood on the bosom of her dress. I opened the dress a little at the neck and found a cut caused by a — a necklace that she was wearing under her gown.”

Hugh’s face had flushed as he stumbled slightly over his words, but his hearer gave no sign of having noticed the break.

“This necklace was a gaudy affair with large imita-

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tion stones, and I took it off and put it in my pocket and laid a handkerchief over the wound. The necklace is there; I'll show it to you presently." He glanced toward the package at his elbow.

"I tried several times to rouse her," he continued, "but failed, and I assure you that ride seemed endless. As soon as we arrived at my aunt's the girl was put to bed and a doctor summoned. The nearest, as it happened, was a friend of Mrs. Thorley's, an Englishman, retired from practice. She naturally was greatly disturbed by the affair and we were both much relieved when Dr. Vining announced, after a thorough examination, that no serious damage had been done. He had succeeded in rousing his patient for a few minutes, but was unwilling to have her questioned, and allowed her to drop off again into sleep. She had sustained a violent shock, he said, and sleep was the best possible restorative for her nerves.

"When he was gone my aunt and I turned our attention to the business that I wanted to discuss with her and we had just about finished with it when the doctor returned. His patient still slept but was stronger, he reported, and as it was high time for me to be on my way to Cherbourg, he undertook to see her back to her home and to negotiate the settlement of any claim for injury that she or her family might see fit to make. She was probably, he thought, a factory girl or one employed in a shop — judging by her clothes — but I'll go into that later. Well, I caught my boat

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and returned to New York. Oddly enough I quite forgot the necklace until I was well on my way to Cherbourg, and at Cherbourg there was no time to send it back and — it has been in my possession ever since.”

He glanced again at the package on the desk, then at Amaranth, who stared at him dumbly with white, set face.

“She has never asked for it — I have waited for her to ask,” Hugh added, then, as Amaranth did not speak, he again took up his narrative.

“What happened when she finally awoke I can give you only at second hand, as I heard it later from my aunt. The only person in the room at the moment was a maid, an English woman. Mrs. Thorley’s servants, let me explain, were all English. Her husband was English and, like many foreigners, loved France but detested the French, so that they always took their English servants along when they went to France for their annual stay. I mention this, because the fact of the household being entirely English had a bearing on what followed. The maid reported that the strange young girl suddenly stirred in her sleep, opened her eyes, and let them travel slowly around the room until they reached the face of her watcher.

“‘Who are you?’ she asked, after a long, silent scrutiny.”

“In English!” Guy exclaimed.

“Yes, and without a trace of foreign accent. This woman was typical of her class and country, and it

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seems possible that Marie in her childhood had seen some one like her and that some childish memory was stirred, for when the woman hesitated, uncertain how she ought to reply, Marie asked: 'Are you Margaret's sister?'

"'No; I am Mrs. Thorley's maid,' said the woman.

"'Mrs. Thorley? Who is she?' Marie questioned.

"'She is my mistress.'

"It was a stupid answer and seems to have struck the girl as amusing, for the woman reported that she began to laugh, stopping immediately with a gasp of pain. 'It hurts!' she whimpered like a sick child, throwing the bedclothes off and pressing her hands against her side, where, as Dr. Vining had discovered, she was badly bruised. The maid ran to the door and called to my aunt, who hurried in after sending another servant for the doctor. The details of the next few days I cannot give you accurately, but Mrs. Thorley will do so, if you wish to hear them. She has had occasion several times to itemize the events of that period for the specialists whom we consulted."

"Specialists!"

"Yes. You see, we became convinced eventually that as a result of her accident the child had lost her memory, that she had no idea who she was or where she came from."

Guy leaned forward, his eyes wide with stupefaction. "You mean — you mean that — that she does n't know *now*?" he stammered

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"No more than then."

Guy dropped back with a deep, quick breath. It was plain from his expression that his mind had not yet begun to reckon with the amazing fact that had just entered it.

"At first, Mrs. Thorley thought she was playing a part, merely pretending ignorance, but that theory soon proved itself untenable. She seemed to try so hard to answer the questions asked her and simply could not. Of her immediate past she apparently recalled nothing whatever. She did not even appear to know that she was in Paris, or had ever been there. Such answers as she gave to questions were of the limited, indefinite kind that a lost child gives — hardly as satisfactory. Vague ideas and visions seemed to float through her mind but she could not fully grasp them. Her name, family, home, she had forgotten utterly. Her memories of places seemed to be the most distinct of any, but they were like the memories of pictures, wholly without associations. Dr. Vining was of the opinion that she had lived in different countries, England, certainly, and some warm country, Italy perhaps, though she spoke and understood no Italian. Neither did she seem to understand French —"

Guy gave a start. "Are you sure of that?" he asked, interrupting.

Hugh Senior stared. "Why do you ask that?" he demanded, adding, when Amarinth did not at once reply, "You said it as if you had some special reason."

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Guy reddened, stammering: "No — but does n't it seem odd — if — if she was a factory girl in Paris —"

"Oh, that guess was made before she regained consciousness, you must remember. The quality of her English, her manners, her bearing, made such a theory impossible. No, she seemed to understand no French at all, and even in English, the one language she spoke, her vocabulary was oddly limited, like a child's. She learned new words rapidly, however, and it was only a short time before the suggestion of childishness, so marked in her speech at first, quite disappeared.

"You understand, of course, that I am running ahead of events," Hugh broke off to explain. "I am giving you in a few words the conclusions Mrs. Thorley was months in reaching. During the week that passed between the accident and her return to England, she was skeptical of Dr. Vining's theory of loss of memory. From day to day she waited, expecting her guest to betray herself. She was exceedingly interested in the case, she says, and being alone, except for the servants, she was able to have the girl with her almost constantly. She tested her in every way she could think of to discover something of her former mode of life, but could arrive at no definite conclusions. Marie showed an unfailing willingness, even eagerness, to perform any service asked of her, but she did everything as a daughter or an obliging guest might do it."

Hugh paused a moment and seemed to hesitate be-

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fore he added: "I said I would tell you about her clothes. They were rather — puzzling."

There was another interval of silence before he continued. He was watching Amarinth now, and when he began again to speak it was less rapidly and disjointedly, as though he felt his way.

"Her dress, my aunt says, was of cheap black cloth, badly made. Her shoes too were of inferior grade and much worn, and her undergarments were very plain, almost coarse. And she wore no hat. All these things you see hang together and represent the every-day clothing of a French working-girl. The incongruous part of her costume was her coat. That was very handsome, black satin with fur collar and cuffs, expensive fur. As a clue it only baffled us. If it had been shabby it might have been explained as cast-off finery, but it was apparently quite new, in perfect condition in fact, except that a small piece of fur had been torn from the collar, a thing that might have happened in the accident, of course."

"But did you make no effort to discover her identity by inquiry?"

"Not at that time," Hugh answered. "You see, my aunt was so firmly convinced that she was shamming. One thing Dr. Vining did do. He found out through a French acquaintance that no girl answering such a description had been reported as missing to the police. When Mrs. Thorley was ready to return to England she was at a loss as to what to do with her

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young guest. She had intended giving her a generous sum of money and turning her adrift, but she finally decided to take her to England, if she would go — still wondering how far the girl would carry her imposture. Accordingly some suitable clothing was secured and packed in a small trunk that had been in the attic of the house when Mr. Thorley purchased it from its French owner. On one end of this trunk was printed the name 'M. Dupont' and being a plain, plausible title it was passed on to the new owner. Dupont, you know, is as common a name in France as Smith or Jones here, and M. suggested Marie."

"And she has no more right to the name than that?" Guy exclaimed.

"No. Of course, my aunt had no idea that she was giving her a permanent name. She could n't see how events would shape themselves. On arriving in England she consulted a specialist whom Dr. Vining had recommended and by his advice Marie was sent to a private sanitarium, for observation and treatment."

"But why did n't she consult a specialist in Paris, where there was a chance of her being known?"

"That would have been the wisest thing to do, no doubt, but it would have involved me in the case, as the cause of the accident, and that my aunt was not willing to do. We all have a horror of red tape, especially the foreign article. Besides, there was still that lingering doubt in Mrs. Thorley's mind of the girl's sincerity."

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"I see. Go on."

"Marie remained in the sanitarium two months, with no result except that she became terribly depressed at realizing that somehow, in some strange way, she was different from other people. Mrs. Thorley then made the round of the specialists and ended by taking her own advice and sending the girl to a boarding-school —"

"But could n't the doctors do anything?"

"Oh, they wanted to operate, of course. Several seemed of the opinion that a blow on the head had interfered with the functioning of a portion of the brain, by pressure, perhaps. To be sure, the skull showed no evidence of such pressure, but that appeared to be the only logical deduction.

"You will pardon me, Amaranth, if I don't go into their opinions, since no two were alike," Hugh resumed after a moment. "That made us wary, and besides the sanest man of them advised against an operation. It might do no good and it might do great harm. Marie's mental powers seemed not at all affected; even her memory, dating from her awakening in my aunt's house, was normal and she acquired impressions and facts with astonishing rapidity. At the end of her year at school she was quite abreast of girls of her own age. It was only that the mental record of her life, from an early date in childhood up to the moment of her accident, had been erased. Why endanger her life to restore it?"

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"But surely she must have had parents or relatives who were searching for her!"

"If so we never heard of it, and I had had a thorough inquiry made. The police system of Europe, especially of France, is such a marvelous network that I am sure we should have heard of a search had one been made. I assure you we have done everything possible, short of taking the world into our confidence. That would have made her a creature apart, and to spare her that has been our constant effort. Can you not understand how deep a sense of responsibility I must feel for her future, her happiness?"

Hugh bent anxious eyes on Amarith. "She asked me to tell you her story, she felt that you had a right to know it. I thought so too. How it has impressed you, of course, I do not know."

"It's all so strange, so unusual —"

"Have you ever felt that there was anything strange or odd about her?" Hugh interposed.

"No."

"Then does n't that prove that this slight abnormality has not affected her real self?"

"She seems just like other girls," Guy admitted.

"She is like other girls."

"But it seems to me incredible that you could n't find out anything at all about her." He hesitated an instant, then asked: "Did you have the Paris police try to — identify her?"

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"Give them her photograph and description, that sort of thing you mean? No."

"Why not?"

"My dear fellow, what for? If her people cared so little about her that they made no attempt to find her why should I hunt them?"

Amarinth leaned forward. "Is that the only reason you didn't give her picture to the police, Mr. Senior?"

Hugh recoiled slightly. "I don't understand you," he said.

"Then you've told me everything you know?"

"Everything."

"Where do you think she was going at that hour?"

"I don't know. Perhaps to work."

"But you said you had become convinced that she was not a working girl."

"Oh, no. I said that our first theory that she was a French factory girl was impossible since she spoke no French and —"

"She looks French," Guy interrupted. "I have heard it remarked by a person familiar with French types."

"Yes, she looks French," Hugh agreed.

"But if she spoke no French, what sort of work could she have done in Paris?"

Hugh said he did not know. "She was dressed like a working-girl, that is all I can tell you," he said.

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"But the satin coat—"

"Ah, there you have it! No theory that we have ever considered would account for all the facts. All we really know is that she is a charming, lovable girl, and for us that has been enough."

A knock at the door heralded the entrance of an office-boy, who announced to Hugh the arrival of a client.

Guy started up. "I'm keeping you, I fear."

"Not at all. Don't go, please. Excuse me a moment and I'll come back. In the meantime you might take a look at the necklace. It's gaudy junk, the sort of thing that might dazzle a girl of sixteen."

The business in the outer office did not detain Hugh long. Returning presently to his private room, he found Amarinth staring down at a mass of jewels in his hand. His face was livid.

The sight halted Hugh.

Amarinth looked up. He moistened his lips nervously. "This is n't junk, Mr. Senior," he said huskily. "It's the real thing."

CHAPTER XI

HUGH SENIOR laughed. "If those stones were real the thing would be worth a fortune."

"They look real. Those emeralds —"

"Emeralds! Green glass."

The younger man said nothing, but his eyes dropped back unconvinced from Hugh's face to the jewels.

"What do you know about stones?" Hugh asked.

He knew very little, Guy admitted, and murmured something about a friend of his mother's who collected jewelry. When he called on her she showed him things and talked about them.

"This looks old," he said; "the backs of the settings are enameled. That's oriental, I think."

"But those colorless stones — surely you don't think they're diamonds. They are not 'brilliant enough.'"

"That might be due to the way they are cut," Guy ventured doubtfully. "I don't pretend really to know, of course. I may be mistaken. I — I hope so."

There was a brief pause before Hugh answered. "I'm sure you are. Paris is full of imitation jewelry — very clever some of it is too."

"You never asked her about it, you say?"

"No. I have never even told Mrs. Thorley that

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I have it. Does that strike you as odd? Well, you know I did n't see either one of them for a year after the accident, not until the following summer. I expected my aunt to write me that the necklace had been asked for, but she never did. When I went over I took it with me. I intended to give it to Marie. It belonged to her; besides, I thought it might rouse her memory. But when I saw her — well, somehow I could n't bring myself to do it. It's such a tawdry, garish affair — so unlike her — that I could n't bear the idea of her connecting herself with it, as she would have done."

"And you have never shown it to any one?"

"Never."

"Would you object to an expert seeing it?" Guy asked after some hesitation.

"You're not convinced?" Hugh inquired with a keen glance at him.

"I want to be sure that you're right, that's all. Of course, I don't see how it could be real —"

"It could n't be — it's impossible. But you have a right to reassure yourself. The only condition I make is that you do not mention my name or Marie's in the matter."

"Certainly not."

"Did you notice that there seems to have been something attached to that middle cluster? Looks as if something had been broken off of it, does n't it?"

Guy nodded, again examining the large middle clus-

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ter of emeralds and diamonds. "Could it have happened in the accident, do you think?"

"Hardly. If anything had fallen off then it would have been found inside her clothes when the doctor examined her."

Guy wrapped the necklace again in the tissue paper and put it in an inside pocket of his coat. "I'll return it as soon as possible," he said.

"Where will you take it?"

"I thought of Rice and Lozier's — I know them there."

"Good. You could n't do better. If you're going after an expert opinion it will be well to have the best, then no doubt can remain in your mind. I think I have told you all there is to tell about Marie. If any questions occur to you later I shall be glad to answer them, if I can."

"Thank you. Good morning then."

"Good morning."

The door closed and Hugh sank back into his chair.

"Suppose he's right! Suppose it's real!" he muttered, his hands groping mechanically over the papers on his desk to which, after a few minutes of troubled speculation, he again forced his attention.

In the brain of young Amarinth the same thought was working as he made his way to the street. At the first corner he stopped, uncertain as to his immediate course. He felt bewildered. Crises had been few in his well-ordered existence and never had he faced one

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which, like this, threatened to wrench him completely from his moorings. Life had always seemed to him simple enough. If a man had the right traditions and thought straight he could n't go wrong. But now —

“Don't marry a woman whom you will have to explain.”

His mother's advice had always seemed to him to cover the ground. Explain to one's friends, to society, had been its meaning. But what would she have said to a girl one could not explain even to oneself?

The story he had just heard struck him as utterly fantastic. That it should be the story of a girl he merely knew was incredible enough, but that the girl should be his wife!

His wife! Yes, he had married her. That was the worst of it. His problem was not as simple as Hugh Senior supposed. He could not simply advance or withdraw as he pleased. A withdrawal was still possible, but only through the painful process of an annulment.

The thought of that course, of the publicity entailed, was so unpleasant that to escape it he started forward once more, and the bodily activity brought a mental impulse. He would go to Gavock.

What a different aspect the latter's encounter with Marie now presented. How damnably it dove-tailed with what he had since learned. Gavock had said he had mistaken her for some one he had known in Paris, some one now dead. Well, Marie had been in Paris

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and no doubt by all her former acquaintances must now be counted as dead. But had Gavock spoken the truth? Did he really believe himself mistaken?

This question suggested to Guy his course of action. If Gavock believed himself to have been mistaken, misled by a chance resemblance, he would probably talk freely. If he had lied he would, on the contrary, have a plausible story ready to cover the lie. Well, the Paris police record might shatter a plausible story.

Amarinth set his teeth. He felt the blood throbbing against his temples. He would be no man's fool! It was his right to know all that any man knew about this girl who was his wife.

Gavock's hotel was the Crustacea but he was out when Guy arrived there. Nothing remained then but to go to the jeweler's and return later. Gavock would perhaps be back by luncheon time.

As he turned down Fifth Avenue, Guy rehearsed the story he meant to offer to explain his possession of the necklace. He would say he was considering purchasing it from a friend who collected old jewelry and wished to know its intrinsic value.

At Rice and Lozier's handsome shop he was informed that the gem expert was not in, but that they had another man who was a good judge of stones, and after some hesitation Amarinth decided to see the other man. After all, it was not the exact value of the ornament that he wished to know. He wanted merely to find out if it had any real value.

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As he removed the paper wrapping from the necklace he was conscious that his hands trembled visibly.

The jeweler's eyes dilated as the necklace was placed before him and he uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Picking up the ornament he held it out where it caught the light fully and let his glance move slowly along its entire length. Twice his eyes shifted for an instant to Amaranth.

"I understand that you wish to know the value of this. As to that I could not say off-hand, of course. It would require detailed examination. The piece is undoubtedly very old, and gem-setters of former times were apt to carry out color schemes regardless of the quality of the material they employed. Some of the stones may not be genuine. May I ask if it is yours?"

Guy had hidden his nervous, icy hands in his pockets and he did not reply immediately, fearful that his voice would betray his agitation.

"No," he said at last, a trifle unsteadily, "I am considering buying it — as an antique. What I want to find out is its intrinsic value, quite apart from its value as an antique."

The man gave a short, odd laugh and looked at Amaranth curiously. "I should say that its value as an antique is practically nothing compared with its intrinsic value. All these larger stones seem to be genuine."

"Emeralds and rubies?"

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"Yes. If they were recut as we cut to-day their brilliancy would be multiplied a hundred times."

"Is it French?"

"French? Oh, no. The French never conceived anything so strong or barbaric in style. You don't know its history?"

"No."

Once more Amarinth was conscious of a surprised curiosity in the keen look that covered him an instant.

"There seems to have been a pendant attached here at one time. It was broken off apparently."

"Evidently," said Guy, holding out his hand for the jewels.

The man appeared not to see the gesture.

"Mr. Stanislas, our expert, will be able to appraise and classify it exactly for you. I hope you will wait or perhaps leave it for him. It is a remarkable piece from any point of view. No doubt it has an interesting history and Mr. Stanislas could perhaps give you information about it. Most of the fine old pieces like this have been described and their histories recorded."

"When will he return?" Guy asked. He was thinking that any information as to the history or identity of the necklace might be a clue to the identity of the girl on whom it had been found.

"Within an hour, certainly."

"Is Mr. Lozier here? I'd like to speak to him."

The jeweler despatched a young salesman for Mr. Lozier, who presently appeared and greeted Amarinth

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by name. He was an affable, white-haired little man.

"I have a necklace here that I should like to leave for appraisal."

"Certainly. I will give you a receipt for it."

"That is n't necessary as long as I leave it in your hands," Guy said, adding as he turned away: "I'll return for it after lunch."

He hurried away, hardly waiting for a reply. His head was spinning, the blood pounding in his veins, and he drank in the cold outdoor air like a drunken man.

Mr. Lozier put on his glasses and looked at the necklace. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed.

"That young chap must have money to burn," said the jeweler.

Mr. Lozier stared inquiringly.

His employee laughed. "He's thinking of buying it as an antique."

Mr. Lozier cleared his throat and frowned a reproof. Then he held the necklace up and contemplated it thoughtfully. "Stanislas will not be back for some time," he observed, looking out through the front door at the passing throngs. "I think there would be no objection from Mr. Amarinth if we should display it in the meantime."

The heavy, jeweled chain was accordingly spread upon the black velvet cushion in the center of the show window. After one critical survey of the result Mr. Lozier ordered everything else removed.

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"It kills them all," he said.

In the sumptuous lounge of the Crustacea, Amarinth chose a secluded seat behind a spreading palm from which he commanded a view of the entrance. Finding Gavock still out, he had decided not to leave a message, but to watch for his return.

The walk up the avenue had not subdued Guy's agitation and he was almost relieved at the interruption of his activity. He felt the need of time to adjust his thoughts to the fact of the genuineness of the necklace. As long as that had been merely a possibility he had resisted consideration of its significance. Now that significance so overshadowed everything else that he was unable to measure it fairly.

Mental perplexities have much the same emotional effect as snarls in a skein of yarn. Up to a certain point interest is held and ingenuity stimulated; exceed that point and we reach for the scissors. Amarinth had passed the limit, he wanted to cut. From Hugh Senior, Mrs. Thorley, or Marie, nothing more was to be expected. They had accepted the mystery, had lived with it, and its strangeness no longer troubled them. But to them the mystery had not been complicated by a knowledge of what he had heard from Gavock and just learned concerning the necklace. More of the necklace he might still find out from the man, Stanislas. Aside from this his one chance of further information was Gavock. His wisest course therefore was to hear the latter's story, cable to Paris for confirmation of it,

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and, if it were not confirmed, nail the lie on Gavock and thus force the truth from him.

As his thoughts ran on, his attention was suddenly attracted by the sound of a familiar voice, and peering around the sweep of palm leaves he caught a glimpse of Sybil Lowther seated at a writing table near by. She was talking with another girl who had apparently just greeted her and who presently departed, leaving her to return to her writing. But Amarith noticed as he watched her that she glanced often toward the entrance. She was probably waiting for some one with whom she was to lunch. As the thought came to him he saw her rise quickly and start forward.

"Why, Mr. Gavock! Think of seeing you here!"

Amarith half rose, then dropped back to his seat. It would be better to wait until Gavock had left her.

"Surely you're not stopping here!" he heard Miss Lowther say.

"Did n't I tell you so last night?" Gavock permitted himself the amusement of reminding her.

But she was not easily disconcerted. "Last night?" she echoed, her eyes widening to their most childish stare. "I don't know. You see, I have left unremembered the things I ought to have remembered and—" She paused an instant and her eyes fell—"I have remembered those things I ought not to have remembered."

Gavock laughed. "Does n't one always?"

"Do you — always?"

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"Of course."

"Fatuous old fool," thought Amarinth.

Miss Lowther smiled and changed the subject. "I just dropped in here to dash off a few notes and watch the lucky people go in to feed, until I got hungry enough to face my humble, boarding-house lunch. Do you know, I did n't eat a bite of breakfast? It was too dreadful a slump from the beautiful supper you gave me last night."

Gavock gulped the bait with his eyes open and Guy gave an impatient start at hearing him say: "Then you ought to be ready to try it again with me."

"Oh, I did n't mean that!" Miss Lowther protested reproachfully. "I felt that we were such friends that I could say anything to you that came into my head."

"We are, but you must allow me the same privilege."

"It would be too lovely! If you really want me —"

Amarinth sprang up. If Gavock was going to feed Sybil Lowther he must try to get a few words with him before. But — he stopped at the thought — a few words would not serve him and Gavock with the excuse of the engagement could easily shake him off. It would be better to wait.

In his indecision he had missed the further conversation on the other side of the palm and now watched Gavock and his companion saunter out. When they had disappeared he started for the hotel entrance.

As he neared the revolving doors they spun round

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and admitted a man who was carrying under one arm a large, flat, oblong package. The edge of the spinning door struck the package and almost jostled it from his grasp, and as his other arm shot out to save it Amaranth saw that this arm lacked a hand. The stump, however, managed to shove the burden back to its former position of security.

"Here! Take that to the back door."

The man stared at the hotel attendant as though he had not heard. "I want to see Mr. Roger Gavock," he said.

The name caught Amaranth's attention and unconsciously he paused. The man was shabbily dressed but his bearing and speech did not suggest a tradesman. However, to the guardian of the Crustacea's sacred portal, a package and a worn coat made a combination for the back door.

"No packages delivered here," he said curtly, waving the intruder back.

But the latter lingered uncertainly. "I have a note I want sent up to Mr. Gavock," he said, and lowering the package to the ground so that it rested against his knee, he felt in a pocket, evidently for the note.

"Send it up from the back," snapped the attendant. "Get along now!"

Amaranth walked off, but not in time to miss the flush that colored the man's face. The fellow looked ill and, confound it, he was n't the sort to be barked at

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by a porter! He'd speak to Gavock and have him report the incident.

But his own concerns were too urgent to remain in the background long and they soon drove the annoying episode from his thoughts. He looked at his watch. It was too early to return for the necklace and he had no appetite for food. Gavock would be an hour at least at luncheon, but it would n't do to risk missing him by staying away as long as that. There was hardly time to go down town but it might be well to call up the office and offer an explanation of his absence.

He found a telephone booth and was soon in communication with the law office in which he was a junior partner. In return for his excuses he was informed that he had just been called very urgently by Mr. Lozier, the jeweler, who requested that he call him up as soon as possible. No, Mr. Lozier had said nothing more.

Guy hung up the receiver and remained several moments frowning into space. He was aware of a curious inner trembling. What could Lozier want with him? His hands shook as he hunted for the 'phone number and felt for a coin.

"Is that Mr. Amarinth?"

Excitement was evident in Mr. Lozier's voice. He made two starts that came to nothing but finally brought out the information that something most unlooked for, most distressing had occurred. Some one,

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in short, had claimed the necklace which Mr. Amarinth had left for approval.

"Claims it! Who claims it?" Amarinth gasped.

"A person who happened to pass a few minutes after it was placed in the window." There followed a stream of apologies for the liberty taken in displaying it, the piece was so beautiful, so rare. It had not occurred to Mr. Lozier that —

Guy cut the flow short. "Who is the man?"

"He refuses to give his name. First he came in and made a few inquiries about the necklace and we told him it was not for sale. He went away but returned in about ten minutes with the Rumanian consul, who presented credentials and entered a formal claim to the necklace as the property of a citizen of Rumania. He says that —"

"Well?" Guy prompted, as the jeweler paused.

"He says it has been missing for seven years. He says it was stolen in Paris."

Guy felt a horrible tightening in his throat. He gulped hard. "Well?" he managed to repeat.

"He says also that at the time of its disappearance it had a pendant attached — a Greek cross — that was as valuable alone as the rest of the necklace. It is evident, Mr. Amarinth, that there was some sort of pendant —"

"Yes, I noticed that. What else did he say?"

"Nothing else. He refuses to give the name of the person for whom he is acting and I think it would be

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well to communicate at once with the — the present owner. You understand, of course, that this formal claim having been entered according to law, it will be impossible for me to return the necklace to you.”

“ I understand.”

“ I cannot tell you how deeply I regret —”

But Amarinth had hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER XII

MISS LOWTHER dipped her fingers into the glass bowl which the waiter had placed before her ten minutes earlier, and at the signal Gavock crushed out the fire of his cigarette and followed her example. With him the ablution was speedily accomplished, but her slender, pink-nailed fingers lingered in the water, dabbling it gently, and suggesting a reluctance to end the repast which her host had already noted.

He watched her expectantly. She was not through with him, of that he was convinced, but just what it was she wanted he was not sure. Money? Certainly the dearth of it had been the burden of her recital of what she called her "struggles." These appeared to him to have consisted mainly of dreams of becoming famous and rich by the pleasant process of awaking some morning to find herself so, and the "crises" so shudderingly depicted, to have been periods in which she had been hard put to it to find the means of living in idleness while awaiting the consummation of her hopes. That a crisis now impended she had allowed him to infer, had even created opportunities for his coming gallantly to the rescue. But these he had neg-

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lected. Her code, according to Mrs. Estell, permitted her to accept anything short of money, and he was wondering now just how far short her demand on him was likely to fall.

As she finally sank her dripping fingers into the folds of her napkin she lifted her eyes with a soft glance to his. "It's been too sweet of you to listen to my tale of woe."

He confined his answer to a murmur of protest. He was anxious not to commit himself. Though prepared to render her any assistance she was likely to ask, he was determined that she should ask and was sure she would do so if he refrained from offering. And he was convinced that her delay was not due to inner shrinking but to indecision as to his most vulnerable point of attack.

"It's proved your friendship beyond a doubt," she declared.

"Ah, then you were testing me?"

She had a smile for his bantering tone, but it waned quickly and she nodded with grave eyes.

"I'm sorry you thought that necessary," he said lightly.

"I did think so, but only because I'm going to put your friendship to a still greater test."

"One you think it may not stand?"

"I don't know."

He waited. She was coming to the point now.

"I'm sure you will do what I'm going to ask of

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you — it is n't that that makes me hesitate," she went on presently. " But I don't know what you may think of me for asking, and you know a nice girl cares so much more for what a friend thinks of her than for what an enemy says."

Gavock sank back with an abrupt relaxation of his interest. So it was money after all. The code did not hold. He might have known it would not. No doubt behind those wistful eyes she was busily making up her mind how much she could safely ask for. The reflection caused him to return dryly: " A nice girl runs no risk either way, does she? "

He regretted the words the instant they were spoken. They were open to two interpretations and one of these was not kind. But she did not take offense.

" A girl, no matter how nice, who has ambitions to achieve sometimes has to run risks," she answered.

He took that in silence, but his contrition for his last remark had softened his expression, and she seemed to draw encouragement from the fact. She surveyed the room swiftly. Only a few people remained and none were near them. The waiter had been paid and had withdrawn.

Satisfied, apparently, that they were sufficiently isolated, she leaned toward him, as if about to speak, then, reconsidering the impulse, sat back again and presently drew from her silk hand-bag an object wrapped in a handkerchief.

" I have something here that I want you to see,"

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she said. "But please don't take the covering off entirely. If any one noticed, it might seem odd."

She passed the thing across to him and he lowered it below the table level before lifting the handkerchief. Within lay a large Greek cross, studded with emeralds and rubies. His eyes flew to hers with surprise and inquiry.

"What do you think of it?" she asked eagerly.

"Think of it? What do you mean? Is it yours?"

"It's been in our family for years and years. That's why I can't bear the idea of selling it."

"But surely you are not thinking of such a thing!"

She sighed. "I have to have money. I must have some at once. What I hoped was that you would lend me some and take this as security."

He frowned. "My dear young lady, I am not a pawnbroker. I shall be glad to lend you the sum you want without security."

"But I can't take it that way. Don't you see that no nice girl could take money? If I borrow from you it must be on a business basis and for that I must give security. Well, this is all I have."

"You said a moment ago that you were going to test my friendship and now you talk of business," Gavock replied, laying the cross before her. "Take your trinket and keep it; it's very beautiful. And now tell me to what extent I can serve you."

"But you must take this, you must! I cannot borrow unless you will accept this security."

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"Between friends their friendship is security enough. Please don't make me feel as if you saw three gold balls hanging over my head."

"I shall have to go where the gold balls hang if you won't keep the cross. And I have a horror of that. Besides, I should be afraid to leave it at such a place. If I did n't redeem it they might sell it. I know you would keep it until I was able to redeem it, no matter how long that might be, and I know you would never speak of the matter or show the cross to any one —"

She broke off with a questioning glance at him. "Please don't mind my asking that. You see the cross is unusual and I thought you might think it all right to show it—that no one would know where you had gotten it. But some one might. It's quite well known to friends of our family. We've had it so long. It was handed down to my mother from her mother, who was French."

"But this is n't French." He took up the ornament again and examined it more closely.

She gave him a startled glance, then with a nervous laugh she said: "I did n't mean to say it was—I said she was."

"What is its history? I should say it was very old."

"Oh, there are all sorts of stories told about it. My mother's family left France to escape religious persecution. Money and jewels were all they were



"Will you give me ten thousand dollars for it?" she faltered



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able to take along. This is the last of the jewels."

"It is very handsome."

"Oh, they were a very rich and distinguished family — the de Ceux."

"Ceux? Not the Ceux of Tourraine?"

"Yes."

"Indeed! Now, do you know, that is very interesting? Many of the old noble families split during the Reformation, but I always understood that the Ceux did not. They are so very Catholic, quite the strongest supporters the papacy has in France to-day. I know young François de Ceux, the present duke, quite well. Really, this is extremely interesting."

His alert, smiling eyes dropped from her face again to the cross in his hand. She watched him with a nervously shifting glance.

"You see what a small place the world is," she said, "and that I was wise to get your promise of secrecy."

"Since I am sworn to secrecy, won't you let me into the family history a little further? This cross interests me immensely. Do you know how it came into the possession of the de Ceux originally?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't believe I ever heard my mother say. I'm sorry to confess that I never paid much attention to the stories of our past grandeur. You see," she added more lightly, "I am more ambitious to be a distinguished ancestor than a worthy descendant."

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He smiled. "Still, blue blood is a valuable asset."

"It is n't negotiable."

"You are a mercenary person, are n't you?"

"I have to be."

"The sale of this gorgeous affair would put you beyond the need of that for some time to come."

She gave him a quick glance. "Would you buy it?" she asked.

"I might. Have you put a price on it?"

"No. I have never thought of selling it — before. How much do you think it is worth?"

"I could only make the wildest guess; but it is very valuable — the stones are all large and seemingly flawless. Frankly, Miss Lowther, if you are the sole owner — I mean if you do not share it with other members of your family — I wonder that you don't sell it. The proceeds would give you a working capital. You could then go ahead and develop your art regardless of financial considerations, and that is the dream of all artists, is n't it?"

"Yes."

She answered absently and he could see that his suggestion had impressed her. Her eyes were almost closed in the intensity of her thought and through her parted lips the breath came and went rapidly, as if urged by some inner excitement. And although she looked at him her gaze was unseeing. He waited for her to speak.

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Presently her eyes regained focus and settled on the cross in his hand. She seemed to hesitate, but finally brought out a faltering question.

"Would you give me ten thousand dollars for it?"

He stared in blank incredulity. The sum she mentioned was absurd; she could not be serious. But she seemed to mean it. He laughed.

"Is it too much?" she asked.

"Too much! My dear child, it's too little — far, far too little. Is it possible that your people had no idea of its value all these years?"

She shook her head. She had turned very pale.

"Well, that was fortunate for you, for you probably owe its possession to that fact. Now, I need not tell you, I hope, that I don't drive bargains at a friend's expense. I should like to own this cross. It is beautiful and rare and it would interest me to trace its history. It is not French, of that I am sure. That the de Ceux should ever have owned it strikes me as very curious."

Intent on the jewels he missed the furtive glance she shot at him from under lowered lashes before she asked: "Why?"

"Because it's a Greek cross and the de Ceux are, as I have said, the most Catholic of Catholics. Some old dignitary of the early Greek church may have worn this on state occasions. The enameling on the back rather suggests the Byzantine —"

He broke off suddenly. "Will you really sell it?"

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Because I'll buy it — that is, if I can afford to," he ended with a laugh.

"How much can you afford to pay?"

"Oh, come now!" he objected gaily. "If I don't drive bargains at my friends' expense, neither do I let them drive bargains at mine. If you really mean to sell the proper way will be to get an expert opinion of the value."

"An expert?"

"Yes, take it to Rice and Lozier's —"

"Oh, no!"

She reached out to take the cross from him, then drew her hand back with a nervous laugh. "I would n't like to do that," she said.

"Would you like me to take it for you?"

She seemed to consider this. "You're very kind," she answered at length, "but I don't believe I want to sell it after all. It's been in our family so long and I —"

"I should n't dream of urging you, of course. I quite understand how you feel, so we'll say no more about it. I shall be glad to lend you whatever sum you wish. But take your cross home and put it away in a safe place. You should n't carry it about in that bag, you know."

He had wrapped the handkerchief about the cross and now held it out to her.

"You must keep it. I can't take the money unless you do, and I need it dreadfully," she pleaded.

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"If you make it an absolute condition —"

"I do — I must."

"In that case I have no choice but to yield."

He held the cross a moment longer before her, then slipped it into an inner pocket of his coat. "I shall put it away in my safe deposit drawer and you shall have it back whenever you like. Shall we go out to the lounge now? I can write you a check there."

"I should rather not have a check, if you don't mind. You see I'd have to cash it and it would look so — odd. Oh, a girl has to think of that! The men in banks have imaginations and — tongues."

"As you like," he agreed. "I can probably get the cash here at the office — that is, if the amount is not too large." He glanced at her inquiringly.

"I need fi— a thousand dollars."

He gave her a keen look. The false start had not escaped him. She had meant to ask for five hundred and had suddenly doubled the amount. He assented with a short nod, but as they walked together from the room he questioned himself, disturbed by vague doubts.

After all, it was extremely odd that she should have had no idea of the value of a piece of jewelry that had been a family possession for generations. But if her story was not true, where had she got the cross? Its presence on his person suddenly irked him. He should not have taken it. He must give it back to her.

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She would not refuse the money; he was sure of that now.

As they were crossing the lobby toward the lounge he felt his companion suddenly give a start, and the next moment he saw her bow in recognition of the greeting of a young man who approached them. The scrutiny with which the stranger favored him in passing caused Gavock to stare in turn and he got an impression of a longish face with Van Dyke beard, flashing black eyes, and fine, straight nose — handsome in the Mephisto style, but hardly prepossessing. He noticed, too, as the man turned away toward the elevators that he moved with unusual grace and swiftness, a little too feline to be agreeable.

The encounter was momentary. Miss Lowther made no comment, but Gavock saw that she was disturbed. The meeting had evidently not been a pleasant surprise.

At the entrance to the lounge he stopped. "Will you wait for me here? I may have to go to the bank or send. The hotel probably banks near by, so it should not take more than a few minutes."

"I'll wait — over there behind those palms," she said.

At the office he found that it would be necessary to send to the bank for additional cash to cover his cheque, but that the bank was near. He would wait, he said, and inquired for mail. There was a letter.

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"This came by hand," he remarked, opening the envelope just handed him. Then he read:

May I see you for a few minutes? I have a picture I want to show you.
JOHN ANDRUS.

There was no address. Gavock beckoned the clerk. "When did this come?" he asked.

The young man searched his memory. The letter had been left some time ago, he thought, and the man had said he would wait.

"Wait where?"

Inquiries ensued, but no one appeared to recall anything more definite.

Gavock frowned impatiently. "Have him paged — Mr. Andrus," he directed. "I'll wait here." He dropped into a deep leather chair commanding a view of the desk.

John Andrus, of all people! What a surprising thing for him to turn up like that. Why, it had been years since he had heard of him, since any of his old acquaintances had, indeed. The man had suddenly and unaccountably dropped out of sight. There had been rumors of foul play as the disappearance remained unexplained. It had been hinted, too, that he had been somehow involved in that mysterious murder —

Gavock's jaw fell in sudden stupefaction. Impressions long submerged had darted up to the surface of his memory and linked themselves with fresher images. It was Andrus — yes, certainly it was he — who

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painted the portrait of Alix Floria which had caused such scandal that it was removed from the Salon on the second day of the exhibition. And it was directly after that episode that she was killed and Andrus disappeared. Where had he been all these years?

Gavock reread the note. How badly it was written! Surely that could not be Andrus's hand. The crudeness of the writing was amazing. To be sure, he had not known the painter well, but the impression he had retained of him was of a man of good general education. "I have a picture I want to show you," the note said. Then Andrus had been painting, and his work should be worth seeing if he had lived up to the promise of his early achievement. Of the young men of his day his talent had been the most conspicuous.

A boy in livery announced that the messenger had returned from the bank. A minute later, standing at the desk, putting the bills into an envelope, Gavock chanced to glance around and to his surprise found that he was being watched by the alert, black eyes of Miss Lowther's friend of the Van Dyke beard. Though the man turned instantly, Gavock thought it probable that he had seen the receiving and counting of the money, and that he might connect it with the girl who was waiting in the lounge. As well to delay, therefore, until the man had taken himself off, which indeed he appeared to be in the act of doing, for he was moving away with his light, swinging stride toward the street exit.

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"Have you located Mr. Andrus, whom you were paging?" Gavock asked the hotel clerk. "No? He left word that he would wait. Please find out who received the message."

This appeared to baffle the entire office force, until some one thought he recollected that the note had come in from the delivery entrance — the bearer had had a package.

Then Andrus had not come himself, but had sent the picture, Gavock decided, and no doubt the messenger would have some further word from him. Directing that the man be taken up to his rooms where he would presently join him, Gavock hurried to the lounge and made his way to the recess behind the palms where Miss Lowther had said she would be.

But the corner was empty.

Slightly taken aback, he looked about, thinking he had perhaps mistaken the meeting place. But Miss Lowther was nowhere in the room. He looked at the time. Exactly eleven minutes had passed. She could hardly have become impatient in so short a time. It was more likely that, not expecting him back so soon, she had gone out and would, no doubt, presently return. And, of course, she would expect him to be there. He had better go to his room, receive the picture from Andrus's messenger, then come back and wait.

Wheeling, with the purpose of carrying out this plan, he found himself face to face with Miss Low-

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ther's black-bearded acquaintance. Not having heard his approach, the meeting disconcerted him slightly and caused him to step back.

A barely perceptible sneer touched the lip of the stranger; then he swerved aside and departed. Gavock, following him with a puzzled stare, was uncertain whether to be annoyed or amused. The fellow was probably a jealous admirer of Miss Lowther's. The girl, no doubt, had a dozen men in tow. She was decidedly pretty and many men would consider her desirable. Well, at any rate, she knew her way about. If she came back while he was up-stairs she would announce the fact by telephone.

CHAPTER XIII

"I WAS detained down-stairs," Gavock said courteously to the shabby figure he found beside his door. "Sorry. Come in, please."

John Andrus entered and waited silently.

"You've brought a picture from Mr. Andrus, I believe?" said Gavock, turning back from closing the door and looking at his visitor.

Andrus returned the look dumbly for several moments, then he said huskily: "Don't you know me, Mr. Gavock?"

Gavock gave him a sharp stare. "Andrus!" he cried in shocked amazement, then, in an attempt to cover the betrayal of his astonishment, he stammered hastily: "I did n't know you, for the moment — I was n't expecting to see you — I thought you'd sent some one."

He held out his hand. Andrus looked down at it, then raised his right arm and showed the empty cuff.

"My God! Man, how did it happen? Your right hand!"

"An accident — seven years ago."

"Seven — why, then that was why you — disappeared?"

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Andrus nodded. "What was left for me — a painter who could not paint?"

"God!" Gavock repeated, the horror of the loss appalling him. "And no one knew? I never heard a word. An accident, you say? What? How?"

"I — I would rather not talk about it," Andrus answered, shuddering.

"But what do you do? What have you been doing all these years? But wait — sit down — you look ill."

He drew out a chair and his visitor sank into it heavily. Gavock stood the picture against the wall. "You *are* ill," he said, as Andrus leaned back and closed his eyes.

"I'm in for typhoid, I'm afraid. There's an epidemic of it where I live. That's why I'm here. I've been doing ads and such things with the left hand — just enough to live — the rest of the time trying to teach it what the other knew —" He paused with a hopeless shrug. "I've no money put by for an illness, but I've got a picture — the last I did over there. I want to sell it. I happened to see in the paper this morning that you were in town and thought perhaps you'd buy it." He looked up with a piteous questioning in his fevered eyes.

"Of course, of course," Gavock assured him instantly.

"I won't ask you much for it," Andrus went on. "You see, if I pull through I shall want it back. I

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need it to keep me alive, to help me remember what I've got in me. If I don't pull through, it's yours and welcome. I'll show it to you." He started up.

"Don't. I'll get it."

Gavock forced him gently back into the chair and felt his hand.

"You have fever now, Andrus, and your pulse is very fast. You ought to be in bed. You ought to have a doctor."

"Saw one this morning — told me what I was in for. I'm all right — going to the hospital as soon as I arrange things."

"Where will you go?"

"Don't ask me, Mr. Gavock. Oh, I know how kindly you mean it, but — well, I just want to drop out again as I did before."

"Your friends thought you were dead. Why did n't you let them know — let them help you?"

"Help me? What could they have done but pity me? Would pity have helped that?"

He thrust his maimed arm out and Gavock was silenced.

"No; I sank to my level among the poor, crushed, hopeless millions. But I'm taking your time. Let me show you the picture."

Gavock unwrapped the canvas and at sight of the painting gave an exclamation of surprise. Turning it to catch a better light he scanned it closely.

"Alix Floria! Not *the* portrait!"

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"Yes. I painted it out. The necklace, I mean."

"Ah, yes, I remember. I didn't see the picture when it was shown. It was for a short time only, I believe."

"One day. I withdrew it."

"You?"

"Did you think they'd ordered it out? You don't know them. They'd have been only too glad of the scandal to draw a crowd. I carried it away myself." He laughed harshly. "I thought the damned thing was paste."

A dozen questions crowded to Gavock's lips, but the haggard bitterness of the other's face checked them. He turned back to the picture, seeking enlightenment there. And something he got instantly — the likeness of the painted face to Marie Dupont's. The resemblance that had haunted him had been real, not fancied. With the memory of the living face fresh in his mind, he studied its counterpart, comparing them, point by point. Miss Dupont was older. For all its young slenderness her figure gave no hint of immaturity. Here the curves were childishly meager, but lovely and alluring in promise. The face, tilted in instinctive coquetry, for all the provocation of lips and eyes, was a child's face.

Twice Gavock had seen Alix Floria dance, then he had gone no more to the Purple Pigeon. The second visit had sickened him. It was the sight of that titled

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brute gloating drunkenly from his box above the stage —

As memory evoked the offensive scene, a detail of it, suddenly recalled, caused him to again scrutinize the canvas. It was the dress. In some such costume she had danced the second time he had seen her, and was it not very like the gown Miss Dupont had worn?

His eyes groped among the intricacies of the painted dress. Assuredly in color, line, and effect this was the gown he had seen in Paris and again last night. Was that a chance resemblance also? No, nor was the other chance. Between Alix Floria and Marie Dupont there must exist some connection, direct and close.

He jerked his head around to Andrus, determined now to question him, but again the artist's face halted the words. The man looked wretchedly ill and should have a physician's care at once. But he had made it clear that he wished no interference with the plans he had himself formed for such care, and the very magnitude of his misfortune somehow made it impossible to intrude either help or sympathy. The most Gavock could do, it seemed, was to pay for the portrait and let him go. The poor fellow seemed actually afraid he would not buy it. His anxious eyes filled Gavock with contrition.

"I'll take it, of course — delighted to get it!" Gavock said heartily. "But I know you don't want

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to sell it. Why not let me help you — just over this illness — a loan —”

Andrus cut him off with a firm refusal.

“As you like then,” Gavock said. “What is the price?”

“Three hundred will see me through — or out.”

“It’s worth far more,” Gavock said.

“That’s all I’m asking,” said Andrus in a tone that closed the argument.

“I’ll give you a check.”

Feeling for his check-book his hand encountered the envelope with the money for Miss Lowther and it occurred to him that Andrus might prefer cash. If convenient he would, Andrus said when asked, and Gavock counted out for him a portion of the contents of the envelope, wondering, as he did so, why he had not yet heard from Miss Lowther.

Andrus stowed the money away with a fever-shaken hand, the maimed right arm jerking up futilely, from a never-broken habit of action. Gavock turned from the painful sight and looked at the portrait as he waited.

“You’ll show the picture perhaps,” Andrus stammered, as he rose to go. “I’d be glad if you’d not mention — seeing me.”

“My God, man!” Gavock broke out. “I can’t let you go off like this, not knowing where you are going. You’re ill, I can see it. You can hardly stand! Wherever you’re going, I’m going with you.”

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Andrus's head went up in alarmed protest. "No, no, I don't want you — I mean I'm all right. I have friends — I'm going to them — there's nothing you can do. Now I have the money it'll be all right."

Gavock frowned in uncertainty. Andrus's distress at his solicitude was plainly genuine. That the poor devil wanted to be alone in his misery was obvious. And he was not the sort you could force yourself on even for his good. Besides, now that he was roused, he seemed stronger than he had appeared before. Still, he looked ill, dreadfully ill. Something might happen before he reached his friends.

"I'm all right, Mr. Gavock. I know just what I have to do. My head's all right and I'll take a cab — I'll be all right," he insisted anxiously.

"Yes, take a cab," said Gavock, catching at the idea as a sort of compromise. "Take a motor. Get home as fast as you can. And get a doctor."

. Andrus assented with a nod, but he remained motionless, his eyes on the portrait.

"And you can feel at ease about what you asked," Gavock added as the request recurred to him. "I shall not mention our meeting."

"Thank you," Andrus murmured without moving.

For a while there was silence between them. Andrus appeared to be lost in thought, unconscious of his surroundings. Gavock watched him curiously. The human drama — too often a tragedy — never failed to hold his interest, and this variation of it had

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not before come to his attention. What was the man thinking of?

Suddenly it occurred to Gavock that he was letting slip by — perhaps forever — the chance to solve a mystery that was likely to prove a disturbance in his intercourse with Guy Amarinth. The boy had not been satisfied by his assurance—given in all sincerity—that he had been mistaken in fancying that he and Miss Dupont had met in Europe. That had been evident from his manner. His manner had also revealed his infatuation for the girl. He would be coming with questions which it would be hard to answer.

He must speak to Andrus. He looked at him, then his glance followed the painter's to the canvas.

"Did you know her well?" he asked.

The artist moved sharply, as though recalled brusklly from distant scenes. For a moment Gavock thought he had not heard, and was about to repeat his words, when he was answered by a silent inclination of the head. With an unpleasant sense of intruding he pushed on. "What is your theory about her death?"

Andrus turned his head and stared. "Theory?" he echoed. "What do you mean? She was murdered."

"That was n't proved, was it? The man got off."

"He was guilty."

The words were uttered with a finality that made Gavock hesitate again before continuing. "I was not in Paris at the time of the trial; I followed it from

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newspaper accounts and some of those I missed ; but I gathered that the evidence was all circumstantial — that there was a reasonable doubt of the man's guilt."

"No one who knew him doubted it."

"But were n't there witnesses who testified that they saw her afterwards — alive?"

"Her dead body answered those lies."

"So you think they were deliberate lies?"

"The body was there. She was dead." Again the quiet note that silenced contradiction.

But Gavock persisted. "I understood that there was doubt that it was hers. The head was —"

Andrus cut off the sentence with an exclamation of distress. The muscles of his face worked as in pain, then he mastered his discomposure — whether physical or mental, Gavock could not determine — and said evenly:

"The trial was a farce. There was meddling from high places. Lies were sworn to and the truth was suppressed. They did n't care how it came out — did n't bother about justice. All they wanted was to prevent mention of the necklace and the man who owned it."

"The Rumanian prince?"

"Yes."

Gavock waited, hoping further information would come unsought. Though it was true that he had followed the trial of the man accused of the murder of Alix Floria from newspaper reports only, he had later

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heard the case discussed by persons claiming to have the unofficial story. Andrus's version coincided with theirs, that it was the mad pursuit of the dancer by the young nobleman that had led to her death at the hands of a humbler lover. In the trial a less conspicuous admirer had been made to figure as the object of jealousy — an easy matter in the case of a girl of unknown origin and history, even the beginnings of her meteoric career veiled and obscure.

"I had heard that," Gavock remarked presently when it was evident that Andrus would say no more unprompted. "There were all sorts of stories afloat." He waited again, then added: "It was even hinted that he killed her himself."

"He?"

"The prince."

Andrus's gaze widened to wonder for an instant and he seemed about to speak, then with a shrug he turned to the door. It was plain that he did not wish to continue the conversation, and in the face of his disinclination Gavock found it hard to push his inquiry. But he knew that if he did not get from Andrus the absolute certainty of Alix Floria's death he was not likely to get it at all.

"I wish you'd tell me, Andrus, why you are so sure that the body found in Floria's rooms was hers. I ask because I have since seen a woman who so resembled her that I could hardly believe it was not she."

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Andrus had reached the door and opened it. "She was n't an unusual type," he said. "And you did n't really know her, did you?"

"I saw her several times and this girl was about the age she would have been. I should not have given it a thought if I had not remembered that there were people who thought they had seen her after the body was found. What I want to know is how you can be so sure about the body, considering that the head—"

"Her maid identified it," Andrus interrupted.

"Oh, that's what you go on?"

"That and the clothes. Is n't it enough?"

"It was n't enough for the jury. It was the doubt of that which led to the verdict of acquittal, as I remember."

Andrus had half closed the door again and turned round as if to reply but changed his mind and swung the door wide once more.

"He knows something," thought Gavock, and with an impetuous gesture arrested his visitor's departure. "I hate to press you, Andrus, but this woman I speak of is engaged to marry a friend of mine and—well, you understand. If you have any other proof that it was Floria's body, I should consider it a personal favor—" He broke off and waited.

"I have the proof of my own eyes," came the answer reluctantly, after a pause.

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"I saw the body."

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“ Oh — and you were familiar with it — she had posed for you, for the figure, you mean? ”

Andrus's drawn skin reddened to the rim of his blonde hair. “ Yes,” he said, turning away, then with a quick movement he again faced Gavock. “ But don't misunderstand me, please. She did not pose for others and — she was my wife.”

And without another word he went out and pulled the door shut behind him.

CHAPTER XIV

GUY AMARINTH looked at his watch again. For nearly two hours he had been waiting in Hugh Senior's office for the latter's return from a consultation with clients so important that he had not felt at liberty to interrupt it. At the end of the hour he had telephoned Lozier that he had not been able to get in touch with the owner of the necklace and the jeweler had agreed that until he had done so a meeting with the claimant would be wasted time. The foreign gentlemen were still waiting and no doubt were prepared to wait indefinitely.

The minutes had dragged with Guy. He had done his best to keep his thoughts from fruitless conjecturing. It was sheer madness to attempt to form an opinion until he had all the facts, he knew. But what were the facts? The more he found out, the more hideous a nightmare the whole thing seemed.

The necklace had been stolen — seven years ago. That was what the claimant asserted and it fitted perfectly with what Guy had already heard. That was the terrifying part of it. He felt as if he were piecing together a picture puzzle — the picture of the woman who was his wife — slipping the sections into place

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with trembling hands, fearful lest from the completed portrait he must at last turn in horror.

As he put his watch back into his pocket the office door opened and Hugh Senior entered. Guy sprang to his feet and at sight of his white, excited face Hugh stopped short.

"I'll see you at once, Amaranth; will you go in, please?" He waved toward the inner room and Guy obeyed the gesture without replying. A minute of delay without and Hugh followed. The door of the private office had hardly closed when Guy broke out with his news.

"Something extraordinary has happened — the necklace has been claimed!"

"Claimed! Who has seen it?"

Hurriedly Guy reported his telephone conversation with Lozier. "I said I'd have to see the owner," he finished. "I did n't give your name; I did n't know whether you'd want to appear in the matter."

"Sooner or later I shall have to," Hugh replied. "And it may as well be at once."

A taxicab conveyed them to the jeweler's at its best speed. The necklace was no longer in the window, they noticed, but the anxious face of Mr. Lozier loomed at the door.

"This is Mr. Senior from whom I had the necklace," Guy said to the jeweler as they entered, following Hugh's instructions.

Lozier bowed. He would have offered profuse

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apologies for his indiscretion in displaying the necklace, but Hugh cut him off with a question. "Where are these men?"

"In my office."

"And the necklace?"

"In a case at the back of the store under constant watch. We are taking no chances with it."

The strangers were found seated in Lozier's private room. The jeweler introduced the Americans to the Rumanian consul, who in turn presented his compatriot as Count Egon Szemere of Bucharest.

"Which of you gentlemen claims to be the owner of the necklace?" the consul asked, the instant formalities were over.

"Neither of us," Hugh answered. "Mr. Amaranth brought the jewels here to be appraised, at my request, but neither he nor I claims to own them. As you, however, have entered such a claim I suppose I may infer that you are prepared to prove it?"

"We are. And we are also prepared to take such legal steps as may be necessary to regain possession."

The consul's manner was brusque, almost offensive. His companion interposed courteously. "I am sure, my dear Consul, that we have only to prove our claim to these gentlemen to make further action unnecessary."

"Thank you," said Hugh, slightly inclining his head, whereupon Count Szemere responded with a ceremonious bow. The two then measured one an-

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other briefly but keenly, and the conclusion of each was that the other was to be trusted.

"You will oblige me, my dear Consul, by presenting your credentials," Count Szemere said, and the Consul, thus reduced to a subordinate rôle, dug into a pocket for the required papers.

Hugh Senior looked them through and returned them with a nod of acceptance.

"My passport," said the Count, offering another paper.

"Your word is sufficient," Hugh answered with a movement of polite refusal.

The Count again bowed deeply. "Then may I hope that your wishes will meet mine when I again suggest that we dispense with legal formality in the exchange of — shall I say, information? The matter is one of extreme delicacy, and a discussion between gentlemen will be more suitable than process of law. I will ask the Consul to withdraw if you will make a similar request of Mr. —" He glanced at Lozier, whose name he had apparently not learned.

"Mr. Lozier will oblige us, I am sure," Hugh said, adding, as the Count's glance moved on to Guy: "Mr. Amaranth is as closely concerned in the affair as I am. Suppose we three adjourn to my office and talk things over there. We can take the necklace or leave it, as you prefer."

"Which do you prefer?"

"I think Mr. Lozier's vault is the best place for it.

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Your interests are safeguarded by the fact that the Consul has entered a formal claim and Mr. Lozier can't surrender it without a release from him. That's your understanding, is n't it, Consul?"

The Consul assented.

"In that case we may go at once," said Hugh. "Much obliged to you, Mr. Lozier. We may rely upon your silence, I am sure."

The jeweler gave eager assurance of that.

"By the way, did your expert look the necklace over?" asked Hugh.

"Not in detail, owing to the circumstances which have arisen; but he pronounces it without a doubt a genuine antique of great intrinsic value."

"I see. Thank you."

The party left the shop and, dropping the Consul, the remaining three proceeded by cab to their destination. Seated in the privacy of Hugh's office, the Count was the first to speak.

"Since neither of you gentlemen claims to own the necklace, is it permitted to inquire for whom you are acting?"

"Only for ourselves," Hugh replied. "The necklace came into my possession some years ago through an accident, and I have kept it, not knowing its value. I shall willingly restore it to you when I am convinced of your right to it."

"I claim no personal right—I act for another," said the Count.

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A long pause followed. Hugh and Guy waited, their quiet faces betraying none of the anxiety and suspense from which they suffered. But Count Szemere's black eyes shone with expectancy as they darted from one to the other of his companions. His former ceremonious demeanor had dropped from him like a shell. He leaned forward eagerly and his quick breathing broke the stillness. A miner entombed for hopeless days might have gazed thus toward the lanterns of his approaching rescuers. Suddenly he spoke, looking at Hugh.

"You have it also, the cross?"

"The cross?"

"To the necklace a cross was attached. It has been broken off — that sees itself."

Count Szemere's voice had grown excited and his English, besides losing some of its pedantic correctness, was now marked by a stronger foreign accent, as if emotion had thickened his tongue.

"Yes, I noticed that the necklace seemed to have had a pendant at one time, but it had none when it came into my possession. It was a cross, you say?"

"A cross of the Rumanian church — a Greek cross, you would call it. It was very valuable, as valuable of itself as the necklace entire."

"I never saw it."

"But you will tell me where, when, and how the necklace came to you?"

"I cannot promise that. I have said that when I

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am convinced that you have a right to it I will give it to you. It is for you to prove that right."

"But you give me only the necklace! The cross — where is that? Surely you will help me that I find it! Where the necklace was the cross must also have been."

Hugh considered. "I will do what I can," he said. "If, when I have heard your story, I feel that I have information that will be of aid to you, you shall have it — that is, with Mr. Araminth's consent. He is, as I have said, as closely concerned in this matter as I."

The Count's keen glance shifted to Guy and the latter reddened under it. At the tell-tale flush the Rumanian cried out: "Ah, your secret concerns a lady!"

"Yes," Hugh admitted.

"And your young friend is her lover! Yes, yes, I see. Do not blush for it. I understand. I too love."

He sprang up and held out his hand to Guy. "Come, let us join hands as men of honor and as lovers. I help you, perhaps, and you help me. You are not happy — you are troubled. I see, but do not ask why. Well, I too am unhappy. Attend! For six years and more I have not looked upon the face of my beloved. In this, your country, I am an exile, serving my country far from all I love, as punishment, because that the loss of the jewels of Kemesvar was put to my fault." He had seized Guy's hand, yielded awkwardly. "Is it agreed?"

"We can promise you nothing, Count Szemere,"

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Hugh interposed. "When we have heard your story we will do what we can to aid you."

The Rumanian bowed low. "You are right. I honor you that thus you guard a woman's secret. The secret I guard touches my honor and the honor of a noble house. Behold, I shall trust you. I now speak to you everything without reserve!"

He sat down again.

"What do you know of my country, of Rumania? That our Queen, Carmen Sylva, writes verses?" His shoulders lifted slightly. "Truly, I think that here little more is known of us. Yet we are a nation, with a history. But I will not bore you. Only this let me say, that when the Prussian Bismarck sent to us a Hohenzollern to be our king, many of our native princes ate the dust of disappointment. Of these princes the chief was Prince Xico of Kemesvar. Hospodar of Wallachia, and later of the United Provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia, he was the nation's choice for king, and the Powers had promised us a native ruler. But Prussia sent the Hohenzollern and he stayed. But he stayed and ruled on sufferance of the house of Kemesvar, as long as the old prince lived, for at a word Xico could have plunged the country into revolt. Dying, he left two sons, Vasilief and Lascar. Vasilief Xico now became head of the house and the master of Kemesvar and — he chose a bride."

Count Szemere's eyes took on a glint of hatred, the muscles of his jaw set hard.

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"She was a woman of Bessarabia, of Tartar blood, low born. His father would have seen him die a thousand deaths sooner than that the blood of Xico should mingle with such as hers. But the Court at Bucharest lent the marriage all countenance, for whatever estranged the reverence of the people from the house of Xico played into their hands. Prince Lascar said nothing to his brother but he swore to me, his comrade, that he would not remain at Kemesvar to look upon the outrage. He too had come into a rich inheritance and wished to enjoy his youth. Feigning illness he announced that he would travel to restore his health and it chanced that this plan suited his brother. Some of the jewels of Kemesvar, proudly worn by princesses, had failed to please the low-born Tartar and she wished the stones re-cut in the fashion of the day. In Bucharest there was no workman good enough, the jewels must be sent to Paris. Since Lascar was to travel, why not to Paris with the jewels? He agreed and we left for France, taking with us the Cross of Kemesvar."

"The necklace, you mean?" asked Guy.

"Yes; so it was called, for the cross itself was the chief treasure of the noble house. In earlier days the hospodars were also bishops of the Church and it was to a prince Xico that the necklace and cross were given on his ordination by the Patriarch of Constantinople. The gift bound the house of Xico to eternal fealty to Constantinople as against Rome and for centuries had stood as badge of honor and loyalty to all of the blood

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of Xico. The change proposed was sacrilege. But Prince Lascar was indifferent. What honor was in the symbol, he said, when honor itself was dead?"

Again hatred and anger gleamed from Szemere's eyes. "Lascar, my friend, is dead," he exclaimed, "and one I love more than life wastes her youth in faith to me; yet I could almost wish the cross of Kemesvar were never found if it must lie upon the bosom of the Tartar hag!"

The mood of violence spent itself swiftly and he continued calmly: "When I talk so I am mad. All my life and happiness depend on the recovery of the Cross. But I waste your time. In Paris we lived as men of our age and class and for such Paris has much to offer. But Lascar soon wearied and talked of Petersburg. I had my reasons for preferring Paris; my betrothed was there and I was able to see her with less ceremony than in Bucharest where she was lady-in-waiting to the Queen; but to remain in Paris the Prince must be amused. One evening, seeking some new diversion, I chanced to hear of the Purple Pigeon, a small theater unknown to me."

He paused and a tremor ran through him. "It was a fatal night for all concerned," he said grimly, "for there for the first time Prince Lascar saw Alix Floria."

"Alix Floria!" Hugh caught up the name. "I've heard of her, I think."

"No doubt. The whole world heard of her soon after, when she was murdered."

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"Who was she?" Guy asked.

"A dancer — Ah!"

Szemere pointed an excited finger at Hugh. "You have remembered something! Our stories have had a meeting, is it not?"

"Perhaps. When did all this happen?"

"In April it will be seven years."

Involuntarily Amarinth glanced at Hugh and the look did not escape Szemere's watchful eyes.

"I see that already I help you. Will you not help me? Will you not speak also?"

"When you have finished," Hugh replied.

"Ah, yes, I will hasten. It is not much more to tell. The Prince went mad for the girl. It was then the question not to make him stay but to make him go from Paris. He would not. Every night he was in a box of the Purple Pigeon. I too was there, for I dared not leave him, his madness for the girl drove him to wine. All Paris talked. In the clubs wagers were laid for and against his success with Floria."

"Then he was not her — lover?" Hugh asked.

"No, never. She was an odd creature, beautiful and very young. Many men were mad for her, but only one she loved — the man who killed her. But I go now too fast. One day she heard of the necklace. A newspaper had told its history and that the Prince had brought it to Paris. How this was known, I cannot tell; from the jewelers, perhaps. We had got from them designs for the cutting and sent these to

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Bucharest that a choice be made, and the necklace waited. Floria wished to see it. The Prince agreed. She wished to wear it to dance. Again the Prince agreed. Always I tried to persuade him from this madness — that a dancing-girl should wear the Cross of Kemeswar was a shame to his honor and name. He laughed. No greater shame, he said, than when the Tartar wore it. Think of her rage when the news should reach Bucharest! We thought of it and laughed — like fools.

“Well, she wore it. She had boasted that she would and Paris watched. The scandal was frightful. A portrait of her with the necklace was shown at the Salon and at once removed. Telegrams came from the King, himself, ordering us to return home. All this but drove the Prince to his fatal madness. We were to leave Paris at midnight, and after dining returned to our hotel. He would not go out, Lascar said; it was better that he should not see Alix again. If I wished to go I was free, he would sleep. I should have suspected, but I did not. He seemed depressed, changed, but I thought him unhappy only. I joined my betrothed at the opera and when I returned he was gone. The following day I looked upon him dead in the morgue.”

Szemere sank back in his seat. He was pale and the muscles of his face twitched as though he had but just lived through the experience he related.

“What had happened?” Hugh prompted.

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"I don't know. No one knows. The body had been found at dawn lying in a ditch by the roadside twenty miles from Paris. He had been stabbed in the heart. The only clue was a piece of fur clutched tightly in 'one hand. I recognized it as like the fur Floria wore on a coat."

In spite of the effort Amarinth had been making not to betray undue interest in the Count's disclosures, nor to attract the latter's attention by another incautious glance, he now gave a violent start.

Instantly the Rumanian was on his feet. "What is it?" he cried. "The coat? You know of that? It was never found, that coat!"

Hugh laid his hand on Guy's arm to warn him to be silent.

"We shall speak when our turn comes," he said quietly, though his face was white.

"I will make quickly an end," Szemere said. "The clue of the fur led to nothing, for Alix Floria was herself found dead in her apartment the same morning. She too had been stabbed. Suspicion for her death pointed to a young Frenchman, the man with whom she was said to have come to Paris. But though the evidence was very strong against him he was acquitted when tried for the murder. This was due to a doubt that the body found was that of the dancer. Her maid identified it, but the head was so mutilated that recognition of the face was impossible. Added to this, several persons appeared in behalf of the accused who

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swore they had seen Floria alive after the body was found. The theory — yes? ”

Szemere glanced at Hugh, who had leaned forward as if to speak. Challenged, he now shook his head. “ Pardon me, go on,” he muttered.

“ The theory accepted generally was that the body was not Floria’s but was one brought from the dissecting-rooms of the School of Medicine, and that it had been mutilated to conceal the deception. This grew out of the fact that the accused was a surgeon who had been allowed to take bodies from the dissecting-rooms to his private laboratory. It was said that there had been a scheme in which the dancer was to disappear, be accounted dead, and an insurance policy in her lover’s favor collected by him. The newspapers made that story. No such insurance policy existed. There is no doubt that the body was Floria’s and that the murderer mutilated it for the purpose of casting on its identity just such uncertainty as did arise and save him. The motive urged against him in the trial was jealousy of another lover — not the Prince, for his name was never mentioned, but a man of lower rank. But the actual motive was the theft of the necklace.”

“ It was stolen that night? ”

“ It disappeared then and has not been heard of again until now. Several days passed before I discovered that the Prince had had it in his possession on the night of his death. I had understood that it

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was to remain in Paris to be re-cut, but it was proved by the jewelers that Lascar had taken it from them that day. What his purpose was, where he was killed, and by whom, was never discovered. All mention of him and of the necklace was carefully excluded from the trial. Afterward it was given out that he was killed in a railway accident that chanced to occur a few days later and this was all the public ever knew. The facts I have given you, gentlemen, involve the honor of a noble house and my own honor. I have placed myself in your power."

"Your secret is safe with us, Count Szemere," Hugh said. "But I need hardly remind you that I cannot surrender the necklace without further proof."

Count Szemere bowed. "You shall have proof. I am attaché of the Rumanian legation in Washington. Through the minister official papers shall be sent that will satisfy you."

"Would it be satisfactory to you if the matter could be settled without official action?" Hugh asked.

"Ah, but I should prefer it! To get back the necklace that is all."

"Then may I ask a few questions?"

"Whatever you like."

"Thank you. It will be seven years in April, you said, since the necklace disappeared. Do you remember the exact date?"

"If I remember? If I could but forget!" Szemere made an eloquent gesture. "It was the twenty-third."

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"And this dancer — how old was she?"

"Very young. Seventeen, perhaps."

"Will you describe her?"

"Certainly," said the Rumanian with a stare of surprise. "Alix Floria was small and in complexion, dark, both hair and eyes. She was beautiful, slender — thin, indeed, I thought her, but of a wondrous grace."

"What nationality?"

"That I do not know. She called herself Italian."

"Was Alix Floria her real name?"

Szemere shrugged. "Is it ever with a dancer? She was not of southern temperament, rather of the north — Russian, perhaps. Her dancing was Russian and she knew languages. English, she knew well."

"Did she speak French?" Guy questioned.

"But surely. Indeed, I think she may have been French. Artists of the stage often call themselves foreign to excite interest. Floria's pose was the mysterious. Nothing was known of her origin. Even after her death nothing could be learned. Yet she was a trained dancer; trained, doubtless, in some ballet school. Her photograph was sent to every city of Europe where a ballet school is maintained, but she was never identified."

"The man who was tried for her murder," Guy now put in; "you said he had brought her to Paris, you spoke of him as her — lover."

"As to that I could not swear," said the Count with

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a slight grimace. "He was so considered, and what is a girl of that career? But he denied that he had brought her to Paris or that he knew more of her than any other. But I saw them together and for him she had a glance that no other man had from her. So others said as well. His name was Renoir — Dr. Felix Renoir."

"Just what was the evidence against him?"

"Chiefly that he was seen leaving the house in which she lived about three o'clock that morning. Two persons testified to that, but they saw him from the house opposite and not near enough to see the face, in the dimly lighted street. They recognized his walk, they said, and indeed to any one familiar with it it was unmistakable, I think. There was about it, something — of an animal, a cat, quick and without sound."

"And the people who thought they saw her after the body was found — where did they see her?"

Szemere reflected. "One in London, in a cab, I think, some weeks later. But the witness who saved Renoir was the tenant of the ground floor of Floria's house. She said she was awakened by the crying of her child, and rising to light the gas she saw that it was already daylight, so she pulled back the curtain of the window which looked on the street. At that moment she saw Floria leave the house — she said. She did not see her face, as the dancer turned in the opposite direction, but she recognized the coat she wore, a black satin coat with collar and cuffs of sable. This coat,

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as I have said, was never found. And the piece of fur in the hand of the dead prince was sable. When I mentioned this before it had an effect on you —”

“You are right,” Hugh said, “but let me get your facts first, please. If this woman did not see the face of the person who left the house that morning, is it not possible that she was mistaken in thinking it was the dancer?”

“Certainly. But she said the woman in the coat wore no hat and had hair like Floria’s. This, added to the fact that the hair and scalp had been cut from the dead body, naturally created a doubt as to the body’s identity. There were also several cabmen who appeared as witnesses. One said he had driven the dancer from the theater to her home, had waited there at her orders, and afterwards taken her to a hotel. Another said he had taken a young woman in a black coat with fur from a railway station to Floria’s address; and there were still others who thought they had taken her to other places. But as none of these witnesses had ever seen Alix Floria and as such coats are not rare, the stories only confused the jury and proved nothing.”

“Then, in your opinion, the dead body was that of the dancer?”

“I have no doubt whatever of it,” Szemere said emphatically. “The clothes were those Floria had worn on leaving the theater that night, and her maid identified the body as hers.”

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"Then who do you think was the woman seen leaving the house?"

"I think no one was seen! The woman who said that was a patient of Renoir, and —" The Count gave a shrug. "He was a favorite with women."

"You think she deliberately lied to save him then?"

"Evidently."

"But where was the maid that night?"

"In the country at her home. Her mistress had given her a holiday. That helped Renoir also, for it suggested that Floria had wished to have the girl out of the way for some reason of her own."

"I see."

"But I have no doubt that the body was Floria's. However, we — the friends of Prince Lascar — had no interest in the verdict. Our concern was to keep his name out of the case and to find the necklace. But now I have told you everything. It is my turn to listen."

Hugh glanced at Guy, as if to leave the decision of their course to him; but the young man only stared back dumbly.

"Is it that you do not trust me?" exclaimed the Count. "Have I then not trusted you?"

"It is n't that I don't trust you," Hugh answered. "But I think it will be better to tell what I have to tell in my library. I have something there I want to show you, as evidence."

"Ah, indeed!"

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"It's now four o'clock," Hugh continued. "Will you pardon me."

He took up the telephone receiver, called his home, and asked for Marie. In the short wait that followed he held his eyes on the instrument, conscious of Amaranth's sharp breathing at his elbow.

"Yes, it's Hugh," he said when the girl's voice came over the wire. "Amaranth and I will be up in a few minutes. Will you give us some tea? Yes, *tea*. Good-by."

He rose. "If you will excuse me I must attend to some business matters before I leave. I'll be with you in five minutes."

"With your permission I'll use your telephone," said the Count. "I had ordered my luggage sent to the station as I intended to return to Washington this afternoon. I must order it fetched back." He moved to the desk.

Guy followed Hugh into the hall. "What do you mean to do?" he asked.

"Let him see her. It's the only way. You want to know, don't you?" he demanded with a keen glance.

"God, I've got to know!" said Guy.

CHAPTER XV

MRS. THORLEY had awakened with a severe headache and had kept to her bed. The periods of acute pain alternating with drug-deadened hours left no mental freedom for the consideration of troubles other than her own; but the pale cheeks and shadowed eyes of the young face that hovered tenderly about her made her heart ache so that she was almost grateful for the distraction of throbbing temples.

As the morning's suspense dragged into the afternoon, the girl's face grew whiter and a haunted look crept into her eyes. When, now and then, the ring of the telephone or door bell penetrated to the stillness of the sick-room she would start violently, then shiver back into tense waiting. And when, at four o'clock, Hugh's summons came, she swayed dizzily as she made her way to the door.

Of all this Mrs. Thorley had been conscious and now she sat up, straining her ears for the sound of the voice at the telephone in the hall outside. The few faltered words she caught told her nothing.

"He won't marry her — he won't marry her." The words beat a sharp tattoo along her stricken nerves.

He was too like his mother — that was it! She

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snatched at the idea as at a long-sought answer to the doubts that filled her mind. Grace Amariath had never been able to see beyond the tip of her own beautiful nose, she recalled, and in the son she had observed the same lack of imagination, the same selfish adherence to the beaten path of personal advantage. Well, let him go and good riddance! If only Marie did not care so much! If only Hugh had not been a fool!

Mrs. Thorley sank back to her pillows with a sigh of despair. Then the door opened and Marie came in.

"They'll be here in a few minutes," she announced tremulously.

"They? Guy's coming then?"

Marie nodded.

"Well, my dear, if he's *coming!*" Mrs. Thorley threw off the words on a deep breath of relief as if with them went all her misgivings. But her reassurance was not reflected in her hearer's countenance.

"Hugh wants tea served," Marie said with a puzzled look.

"Tea!"

"That's what he said. But he never takes it. Neither does — either of them."

"What exactly did Hugh say?"

Marie repeated the conversation.

"Oh, well, he's coming any way, so your troubles are over and you can stop looking like a haunted spirit. The sight of you was more harrowing than neuralgia.

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Now go and make yourself beautiful for your future lord and master. He deserves it since he's decided to behave like a man, after all."

The girl had turned away, but at the final words she stopped.

"Then you thought he would n't?"

"Yes, I did, frankly. That's why I did n't want him to be told."

"Do you think he need never have known?"

"You could have told him after you were married."

"Would n't he have resented my not telling him before?"

"Probably. But as his wife your hold on him would have been stronger than it is now."

"My legal hold, you mean?"

"No, I mean your hold on his affections."

Marie turned away again. Before her eyes rose the face of Guy Amarinth as she had seen it last, flushed and anxious, suspicious, almost hostile. Suddenly, stopping again, she asked:

"Did you meet Mr. Gavock last night, Mr. Roger Gavock of Paris?"

"No, as it happened, I did n't, but I heard that he was there. You met him? He's rather an interesting man, I am told. Lives abroad altogether. Made an unfortunate marriage when he was very young and has never tried it again. His wife turned out to have been — well, that sort, you know."

"What sort? What do you mean?"

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"The sort men don't marry."

"Oh, I see," said the girl, and after a moment, "What did he do?"

"Divorced her, of course."

As she spoke Mrs. Thorley gave a wince of pain. "There's that nerve again! I shall simply have to have another powder. It's madness, I suppose, but I may as well die a drug fiend as a martyr."

She swallowed the powder which Marie prepared for her and subsided into her pillows again. "Run along, child, and forget I'm on earth," she counseled. "I really shan't be in five minutes."

The girl lingered a moment longer beside the bed until convinced that the invalid was comfortably settled for sleep. Pausing on the threshold, she hesitated and finally brought out a question.

"What became of her?"

"Her? Who?"

"Mr. Gavock's wife — afterwards."

"Oh, Heaven knows!" said Mrs. Thorley.

CHAPTER XVI

DIRECTING the servant who admitted them to tell Miss Marie that they had arrived, Hugh Senior led the way back to the library. The waning afternoon light filled the room dimly and as he entered his hand moved mechanically toward the electric switch beside the door, but, contact with it rousing him to a sense of his action, he drew the hand back again. Inviting his guests to be seated, he crossed to the fireplace and threw a fresh log on the irons, then lingered, looking down at the fire, while he brushed the wood-dust from his hands.

No one spoke. Count Szemere's glance trailed from object to object, darting back every now and then to his companions. He sat erect, expectant. Guy Amaranth's hands gripped the arms of his chair which was turned away from the door and he stared before him with eyes that seemed to listen, fearfully.

Hugh was listening too. While the others only waited, with him lay the responsibility for action. The drive up-town had been all but speechless, and over and over again he had challenged his judgment in deciding on this heroic measure, only to be thrown back on it each time as the one possible course. But what

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would the outcome be? It was not to satisfy Amarinth nor himself that the girl they both loved had not been a notorious dancer — that fact could have been established without a face-to-face encounter with Szemere. But on the encounter Hugh had built hopes of a greater decision. If the Rumanian's story was true, there was no escaping the conclusion that in some way Marie was involved in it. If not Alix Floria, she was perhaps a friend, a servant, and might have known Szemere. The sudden sight of him should come as a shock to her, and a shock, the specialists had agreed, was the one thing, short of an operation, that might restore her lost memory. The risk was great; the shock might do more harm than good — one could never count with certainty on such things —

A step in the hall!

Amarinth stirred sharply in his seat but did not look around; Szemere glanced toward the door, then at his host, who had wheeled and taken a pace forward. He fell back again, however, as the butler appeared in the doorway, bearing a tea-tray.

"Miss Marie will be down immediately, sir; she told me to bring in the tea."

Hugh nodded. The man set the tray on a table and lingered a few moments, rearranging its contents. Hugh cleared his throat to speak and end the pause that in the servant's presence had become oppressive, but could muster no words trivial enough for the purpose.

The butler struck a match and lit the spirit lamp

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under the kettle, then left the room. But he had hardly crossed the threshold when Hugh's voice recalled him.

"Switch on the lights, please."

The soft glow from the low lamps now filled the room. The butler moved about quietly, pulling down the shades of the windows, then withdrew. Followed a short space of silent waiting, then a light footfall in the hall. The next moment Marie Dupont entered.

Hugh had stepped swiftly forward to meet her. At the certain knowledge of her approach an instinctive prompting that he could not resist had thrust him between her and the test he had himself prepared for her. For a moment his body screened her from Szemere's eyes and in that moment, as he looked down at her, it seemed to him that never before had he fully known that he loved her.

Every familiar detail of her loveliness seemed to spring into high relief, and as his eyes met hers, dark-rimmed and anxious yet bravely lifted, he would have given all he possessed for the right to push her from the room, from sight of the two men who menaced her happiness. He knew that they had risen, he felt them at his back; he knew that Szemere had stepped forward — he must have advanced as far as the table where the tea things stood — now he was waiting — waiting —

"Did Morgan bring the tea?"

The light question restored Hugh's wavering self-control. Instantly his mad impulse receded and with a word of assent he moved aside and turned.

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"Count Szemere, let me present you to my ward, Miss Dupont."

She started forward, offering her hand, and the Count extended his own as he advanced to meet her; but at the second step he recoiled violently, and the uncalculated movement threw him so roughly against the tea-table that the light-legged structure was overturned amid a crash of china.

Neither Amaranth nor Hugh moved. Their eyes sped from Szemere to the girl and back again. The Rumanian, having regained his footing by a clutch at a chair, stood staring at Marie, wild-eyed, aghast, trembling in every limb. She looked at him a moment with a sort of wonder which as hostess she tried to conceal, then started forward with a little cry.

"Put out the lamp, it's burning the rug!"

Hugh and Guy sprang to do her bidding and the creeping flame was extinguished. She meanwhile had crossed to the bell and rung.

"I'll have Morgan bring more tea," she said.

Count Szemere took a deep breath and for an instant his shaking frame relaxed in relief; but only for an instant, then his muscles grew tense and excitement leapt to his eyes. This was no apparition then, but a woman! By force of will and the power his years of diplomatic service had given him, he swept his face clear of all emotion and when he spoke his voice betrayed nothing more than his words expressed.

"I regret infinitely that I have been so awkward,



At the second step he recoiled violently

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Mademoiselle — I should say rather, Miss — I fear I have not understood the name —”

“Miss Dupont,” said Hugh.

“Ah, yes — Dupont. As I say, I regret infinitely —”

“Oh, it was nothing that is not easily repaired,” she assured him graciously. “Here’s Morgan now.”

As she turned to give an order to the servant, Hugh interposed.

“If you’ll excuse us, we men will go to my den while Morgan clears up here. It will take him some little time and we have a matter of business to discuss and — Count Szemere is rather hurried. If there’s time we’ll have tea afterwards, if you’ll join us.”

He hardly glanced at her as he spoke and was conscious that his manner was brusque, but his one thought was to get Szemere away from her. She had not recognized him, that was plain. But he had recognized her. The shock had missed her and fallen on him. The tea had been ordered merely to bring her to the library without seeming to make a point of her coming, and it had chanced, luckily, to bridge a dangerous moment. But nothing was to be gained in any way by prolonging the present situation.

She looked at him, surprised. “Certainly, whenever you like,” she stammered.

“I’ll let you know by Morgan,” he said over his shoulder as he crossed and threw open the study door. “This way, Count.”

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The Rumanian bowed deeply to Marie and passed out.

Amarinth stepped forward to follow. He looked at Marie, but she only inclined her head and did not meet his eyes.

"She's afraid to face me — she's afraid!" he told himself and strode after the Count.

Hugh paused before closing the door and looked back, but she had turned and was hurrying toward the hall. A sense of what she must be enduring in anxiety and suspense overwhelmed him, and he made an impulsive move to follow her, but encountering a surprised stare from the butler, on his knees among the ruins of the tea-service, he halted abruptly, turned, and entered the study.

CHAPTER XVII

“**A**N extraordinary story, Mr. Senior!” exclaimed Count Szemere, when Hugh had finished relating the history of Marie Dupont in much the same words as had conveyed it that morning to Amaranth. “Frankly, were it not for my confidence in you I should hardly credit it.”

“Here are papers which will bear me out,” said Hugh. “This is a record made by my aunt of the opinions of the specialists consulted, and notes of her personal observations of the case. These others are letters from various persons who came into direct contact with the girl: physicians, the nurse at the sanitarium, the head mistress of the school she attended in England. Surely these must convince you that it is a genuine case of lost memory.”

Szemere looked through the papers, pausing now and then to read portions.

“Surely these must convince you,” Hugh repeated.

The Count returned the papers with a shrug.

“Women are sometimes very clever!” he murmured.

“But what had she to gain by such a deception?”

“Ah, who knows?”

“But what *has* she gained by it?”

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The Rumanian glanced at Amarinth. "She is about to contract a very desirable marriage, is it not so?"

Hugh made a sound of impatience. "You think she could have counted on that from the start? Why, she was a child!"

"In years, yes, but hardly in experience. Pardon me, Mr. Amarinth, if I offend. For you I have all respect and sympathy. I should gladly have spared to you all knowledge of the past career of — Miss Dupont, had that been to me possible. But when I have told to you the story of the dancer at the *Pigeon Pourpre* I could not know —"

"I understand. Don't apologize," said Guy.

"She was no more prepared than you were for the meeting here this afternoon, yet she did n't betray the slightest sign of recognition. That should convince you, I think," Hugh remarked.

"As to that, I am not convinced — not quite, you see — that she was not prepared."

Hugh stared. "I don't understand you."

"Pardon. I make not to accuse you. But before we have left your office you have been for a quarter hour in another room. In that room there was perhaps a telephone — Oh, I do not accuse! I say only that you had the opportunity, had you wished —"

"You're right, I could have warned her. But the fact is that when I brought you here I had the hope that if she had ever seen you before the sight of you might be shock enough to restore her memory. The

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doctors have said that a shock might do it. I said to myself that if she did not know you, either she was not Alix Floria or —”

“She is Alix Floria. Of that there is no doubt,” Szemere cut in.

“An hour ago you said there was no doubt that Alix Floria was dead!”

“I had not then seen her alive!” the Count cried excitedly. “This Miss Dupont is Floria in face and figure. And was she not wearing the necklace? What proof could there be more? But tell me this, how could you think I would so affect her when the necklace had not done so?”

“She has never seen it.”

“Ah! And why?”

“She never asked for it and I thought it had no value. For seven years it’s been in that drawer there, sometimes locked up, sometimes not.”

“My God!” The Count’s horrified gaze rose from the drawer to Hugh’s face. Suddenly he leaned forward. “Show it to her now,” he said.

“No,” said Hugh sharply. “I shall turn the jewels over to the owner as soon as they have been positively identified by the Rumanian Government. Owing to their great value I must insist on that. You gain your object, the recovery of the necklace. What more can you want?”

“The cross, Mr. Senior.”

“I know nothing about that.”

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"She knows."

"She may have once — she does n't now."

"The sight of the necklace may recall it."

"I don't wish it recalled!"

Hugh spoke defiantly; he meant defiance. If the girl's past was what Szemere said, then she should never know it if he could keep the knowledge from her. The risk he had taken in confronting her with the Count now seemed to him monstrous. But he had not for a moment really believed that she was Alix Floria. He realized that now — now that her identity with the dancer appeared to be a proved fact. But he would take no further risks, neither for Szemere's satisfaction nor for Amarinth's. Amarinth must take her as she was or leave her. Far better that she should lose him than lose her virginal unconsciousness of whatever horrors lay imprisoned in her memory.

"Let me explain," he said, as Szemere was about to protest. "This girl is my ward — I use the word in its truest sense. I am responsible for the condition in which you find her. She had her place in life and through me she lost it. I have given her another and I don't mean to let her lose it through you or any one else. What her life was, prior to the moment that my car struck her senseless that morning, I don't know. But what it has been since I do know, for she has lived it in my sight, day after day, for years. She may have been all that you say: a professional dancer in a low-class theater in Paris, a girl who flaunted the jewels of

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a prince and — paid for the privilege. I can't deny anything. I don't know. But I do know this, that vicious as her past may have been not a trace of it remains in her consciousness to-day, not a trace. In an instant the slate of her mind was wiped clean of it."

He had turned from the Count and let his glance dwell on Guy, but the young man, after meeting his eyes briefly, resumed his tight-lipped contemplation of the floor.

"Some one has wisely said that we are only the sum-total of our thoughts," Hugh proceeded. "And the thoughts of this girl are the thoughts of any young girl of pure life. What but shame and misery could the resurrection of an ignoble past bring to her? How can you dream that I would permit it?"

"An operation would have had that result and you have said you thought of that," the Count observed.

"I have not considered an operation since I have realized all it might entail, nor will I risk the enlightenment that the sight of the necklace might bring. I am responsible for her happiness and I shall guard it with all my power. Certainly I shall not allow memories to be poured into her mind that would pollute it."

"I respect your motive and your sentiment, Mr. Senior," Szemore replied suavely. "Though I confess your attitude seems to me absurd. Am I permitted to indicate that you, of the three of us, are the only one who has nothing to lose and something to gain by keeping your ward in her present mental state?"

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Mr. Amarinth, as her *fiancé*, might be pardoned, I think, for wishing to have the mystery of her past made clear."

The Count paused long enough to give Guy a sympathetic glance, being sufficiently a diplomat to convert to his own uses the emotions of another.

"For myself," he went on, "the recovery of the necklace without the cross will not serve. Were I free to choose, gladly would I sacrifice my heart to preserve the innocent conscience of your ward. But alas, I am not so free! On the recovery of the Cross of Kemesvar is depending my future and the happiness of one dearer than my life. Until it is restored to Prince Vasilief I must serve here, an exile from my home and all most dear to me. That is the will of his Tartar wife. To please her am I punished, for the King finds it agreeable to oblige the Princess Xico. In your ward lies now my one hope of finding the cross. You must therefore pardon that I insist."

"I'm sorry, Count Szemere, but my mind is made up. She shall not be shown the necklace, nor shall she be questioned about it."

An ominous light appeared in the Rumanian's eyes and he opened and closed his hands with quick savage movements of anger. But his voice when he answered showed no trace of annoyance.

"I repeat that I respect your sentiment, my dear Mr. Senior, but I fear you do not comprehend fully of this matter. When you met this lady she was wearing a

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necklace which did not belong to her and she was, it appears, running away with it. That act might be called by a name you would not wish to join to the name of a person you admire. The mantle she was wearing you have told me was of black with sable collar. Very well. In the dead hand of Prince Lascar there was found a piece of sable. Have you forgotten that?

He stopped and let his eyes rest on Hugh's an instant.

"Maybe it was that the hand that took the cross from the necklace was also the hand that killed the Prince. Who knows? Who — but the lady?"

Hugh gave back the narrowed glance without flinching.

"You're wasting your time," he said curtly. "I know as well as you do that the last thing you want in this affair is publicity. You don't want it any more now than you wanted it when you so carefully excluded all mention of the Prince and his jewels from that murder trial."

"You deceive yourself!" cried the Count, and for the first time his voice broke from his control. "To-day the affair is quite other. Then we had first to conceal the death of the Prince. For that the search for the necklace was done in secret. To-day we may seek openly. No man nor woman shall be spared but that the cross is found. I have spoken! Terrible things may come. Who knows? In Paris, a man, a

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lover of the Floria, who was believed to conceal the necklace, was seized, taken to Bucharest, and there tortured. His hand was cut off to make him to speak! Terrible things may come—if no other way is found!”

“Threats won’t help here, Count Szemere. This is New York, not Bucharest. The necklace will be returned to you when your Government has identified it. Beyond that I cannot help you. This is my final word.”

Szemere whitened with rage and his body shook as in a chill. He sprang to his feet and faced Hugh, who had risen in signal of dismissal. They measured each other silently.

Amarinth had also risen and now he took a step forward to a position beside Szemere and opposing Hugh.

“It’s not my final word,” he said sharply.

His companions turned and stared at him.

“I think Count Szemere has a right to know all she might be able to tell him,” he said. “And *I* have a right to know!”

“What right,” demanded Hugh. “You’ve made your decision—that’s been evident for some time. Would anything you could learn now alter it? You have no intention of marrying Marie. I don’t deny your right to withdraw. But you are pledged to secrecy. I have your word of honor—don’t forget it.”

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"And I have yours! You told me that if I married Marie her story would become my property to use as I saw fit. Did n't you?"

"Yes." Into Hugh's gaze a faint surprise had come.

"Well — I married her last night."

There was a dead stillness.

"Amarinth — is that true?"

Guy took the marriage certificate from his pocket and without a word handed it to Hugh. The latter's hands shook as he opened it and read its contents. Then he handed it back.

"What are your orders?" he asked huskily.

"First show her the necklace."

"Where?"

"If you will permit a suggestion, Mr. Amarinth," Szemere put in, "I think it would be well that she sees it here — quite unprepared — that is, if Mr. Senior does not object?"

"As Mr. Amarinth pleases."

"That's the best way, of course," said Guy.

Szemere continued eagerly. "With Mr. Senior's consent the necklace can be brought here by the Rumanian consul. All may quickly arrange itself by telephone."

"Why not let one of Lozier's men bring it?" Hugh asked.

"The consul's permission is now necessary."

"Then let him come with Lozier's man. You can

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'phone him and I'll call Lozier. There's a 'phone in the library."

The sending up of the necklace was soon arranged for, then the three men sat down to wait. No one attempted conversation. After a few minutes of silence Hugh rang for afternoon papers and each made an effort or pretense at reading.

In about twenty minutes the consul and his escort arrived and were shown into the library. A box containing the necklace was delivered and the bearers retired to wait in the drawing-room.

When the three were again alone, Hugh looked at Amarinth. "What are your orders now?"

Szemere replied. "We must surprise her. Look! We shall place it so — just under the lamp." He opened the box and set it in the position indicated. On its background of velvet and with the strong light full upon it, it blazed. "Now I turn out the light — so. When she enters you will ask her to sit there — just by the lamp."

Hugh nodded.

"For me, I am placed here. Suddenly I advance and turn up the light — so!" Again the gems sprang to life. He looked for Guy's approval.

"That's all right," the latter responded.

Hugh had been standing watching with compressed lips, his face pale and drawn. Now, at Guy's words, he crossed to a bell and rang. Morgan appeared.

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"Bring the tea, please, and — ask Miss Marie if she will join us."

"Yes, sir."

The butler departed and Szemere, who at the servant's arrival had changed his position so as to screen the jewels from view, now resumed the seat he had chosen for himself, and again lowered the lamp.

The butler returned with the tea-tray and carried it to the table on which its predecessor had stood. Then he struck a match and lit the spirit-lamp.

The ears of the three men were strained toward the hall.

"Will I make the tea, sir?"

Hugh looked up with a slight start. "No, Miss Marie will do it."

"Miss Marie has gone out, sir."

"Gone out! Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir. I chanced to be in the hall when she went, sir."

"When was it?"

"About half an hour since, sir."

"Then she may have returned. She's probably with Mrs. Thorley."

"I've just inquired; she's not in the house, sir."

"She left no message?"

"No, sir. Mrs. Thorley was asleep and the maids did n't know as how she was out. Will I make the tea, sir?"

"No, that's all."

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"Yes, sir."

The instant the door closed on the man, Szemere rose excitedly.

"She has run away! She knew me and was afraid! She has seen her danger better than you, Mr. Senior. Ah, pardon! But I cannot longer pretend to believe your story of the lost memory. It is too bizarre, that! She is afraid and runs away, that simply. How else will you explain?"

"I can't explain," Hugh replied. "I can only assure you that I have acted in good faith with you both. I had no idea of this marriage. She told me nothing."

"I had forbidden her to tell you," Guy said.

"Exactly. And I don't know what other orders you may have given her. I don't know where she has gone nor why. I know nothing. The affair, Count Szemere, now rests between you and Mr. Amaranth."

"It is not to waste time here!" The Count was dragging on his overcoat. "The necklace must go back at once."

Hugh assented and with the box of jewels led the way to the drawing-room where the Rumanian consul and his companion waited. Their cab stood at the curb and they presently departed in it with the necklace.

Szemere bowed formally. "I have warned you how far my Government will advance to recover the necklace and the cross. I now communicate with my chief at Washington for authority to proceed. If I have not satisfactory news from you in the meantime the

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affair will be placed in the hands of the police. My hotel is the Knickerbocker. Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon," Hugh answered.

Szemere strode to the door. Guy moved to follow but a gesture from Hugh halted him. In silence they stood waiting until they had heard the outer door open and close.

"Have you no idea where she has gone?"

Guy shook his head sullenly.

"This marriage? When was it and where?"

"Last night. We left the ball, were married, and went right back. It was my fault, I suppose; I persuaded her," he admitted grudgingly. "Afterwards, she told me there was something she had kept from me — something you would tell me. Well, I thought if you knew we were already married you might keep something back; and I wanted the truth." He laughed harshly. "I'm getting it, I guess."

"Then you believe all this?"

Guy made a noise of irritation. "Oh, what's the good of talking about that? If we are to keep the police off the case we shall have to do something."

"What?"

Guy hesitated, his eyes leveled suspiciously on Hugh. "I'll tell you later," he said, crossing to the door.

"I don't think you need worry about Szemere going to the police. That was only bluff."

"I'm not so sure! Oh, it's easy for you to take the thing calmly — she's not your wife. Why did she

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go away if it was n't to avoid meeting that man again?"

"Why should she have wanted to avoid him? She did n't recognize him."

"I'm not so sure of that!"

"I see. Then you agree with him that it is n't a case of lost memory, but simply pretense?"

"My God, I don't know what to believe!" Guy answered with a jerk at the door.

"Perhaps, like Szemere, you think I warned her of his coming?"

"No, I think you've been square with me. I realize that you need not have told me anything about her. But there's one thing I know — she had seen that man before she met him in the library."

"Seen him? Where?"

"She was standing at an up-stairs window when we got out of the cab. I happened to look up and when she saw me looking she jerked her head away."

He flung the words at Hugh, then waited.

"If she was afraid of meeting him why did she come down? She could easily have made an excuse," Hugh said.

"I don't know — I don't know! That's what's driving me mad — I don't know anything!"

The sound of the outer door closing came to Hugh's ear, then Amaranth's quick tread on the sidewalk.

So, she had seen Szemere arrive, had known when she came into the library that he was there! Hugh re-

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called how he had stepped between them to shield her from the Count's sight, and with the memory came the vision of her face at that moment. Instantly all doubt of her vanished. Suspicion could not exist in his mind, side by side with her image. She had gone away, where or why he did not know, but he knew she would come back.

He paced the floor, his nails digging into his palms. His aunt was right — he had been a fool to stand aside for other men. What had come of it but misery for her and all of them? He had meant only her happiness and had sacrificed himself that she might find it in her own way. And that way had brought her to this, that she was the wife of a cad, a hound, who was ready to believe her all that was despicable and vile.

Married! His wife! And not a word, not a glance, had passed between them in the library. He was sure of it, for he had watched in wretched jealousy to see what look she would have for the man she loved.

A cry of rage broke from him. He was seized by the primitive instinct to kill the thing that thwarted him. Back and forth across the room he paced, and it was long before his mind was calm enough for rational thought. But reason could not help him. It reminded him only that he could do nothing, that Amarinth was master.

But, yes, one thing he could still do. The knife! If Szemere should carry out his threat and go to the police —

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He hurried to his study and unlocking the drawer from which the night before he had taken the necklace, he took out the box in which lay the dirk with the carved bone handle. No one had ever known of its existence except Dr. Vining. They had decided that it would be wiser not to alarm Mrs. Thorley by telling her of it. But it was this knife, hidden in the girl's bodice, which had caused the wound on her bosom, the blood from which had led to his discovery of the necklace. This was the one fact that he had concealed from Amarinth.

However, to whatever lengths Szemere might go, the fur-trimmed coat could never be produced, for it had been destroyed in a storage-house fire in London. But the knife was there and if the house were searched! "Maybe it was that the hand that took the cross from the necklace was the hand that killed the Prince."

Szemere's words rang in Hugh's ears. He must get rid of the knife. If found, Szemere might recognize it. He stared down at it lying in his hand. It could not be destroyed. He must hide it.

He glanced about the room, seeking a hiding-place, then passed into the library. There, he finally decided on a window-box from which a thick growth of ivy climbed a low trellis. The blade pierced its way through the soil to the bottom of the box and he buried the handle well under the surface. Then he smoothed the broken earth above it and carefully readjusted the displaced creepers.

CHAPTER XVIII

GAVOCK looked at his watch and returned it to his pocket with a puzzled lift of the brows. Half-past five and Miss Lowther had not returned. He had replaced in the envelope awaiting her the bills he had taken out for Andrus and he was now anxious to turn the money over to her and to give her back her jeweled cross.

The possession of the cross worried him. Her ignorance of its value, her aversion to offering it at a pawnshop, or even to submitting it to a reputable jeweler for appraisal, her insistence upon leaving it with him — all things that had seemed natural enough as she explained them now bristled with suspiciousness. He was willing to make her a loan or a gift, whichever she preferred to call it, but he wanted nothing to do with that very remarkable piece of jewelry.

He examined it again. It was a gorgeous affair, but too large and heavy to have been designed for feminine adornment. A family heirloom! How could he have credited so absurd a statement for a moment?

The telephone bell rang, but to his disappointment it announced not Miss Lowther but Amarinth.

Gavock put the cross away again in his pocket, and

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after a brief deliberation carried the portrait of Alix Floria into his bedroom. He had no doubt as to the purpose of Guy's visit and was glad it had not been made earlier, as he was now in a position to deal with the boy frankly. Alix Floria was dead. Andrus had said so and Andrus was her husband and an artist, and Gavock asked no better identification of her body than that which such a trained, familiar eye could give. Miss Dupont, whoever she might be, could not be the dancer, Floria. That much was certain. Still, her resemblance to the portrait of Floria was so striking that it would only disturb Guy to see it.

The young man wasted little time on greetings. "I've come to ask you some questions, Mr. Gavock," he blurted out. "You mistook Miss Dupont for some one yesterday and last night you said it was for some one who is dead. Is that true? Is she dead?"

"My dear boy!"

"You can't blame me for doubting you, can you?" Guy protested. "After what you said last night about lying to shield a woman you could hardly expect me not to!"

"You're right," Gavock admitted. "But it happens that Miss Dupont does not require shielding, so I am free to indulge in the luxury of telling the truth. I mistook her for a girl named Alix Floria who was murdered in Paris seven years ago."

"You are sure of that — that she was murdered, I mean?"

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"Why, her body was found in her rooms!"

Gavock tossed this off with the air of one settling all doubts, and his tone almost stung Guy into voicing the doubt he knew existed. But he caught his words back in time. His game was to know nothing until he had extracted the sum total of Gavock's knowledge.

He affected relief. "Oh, so there's no doubt about her being dead?"

"Of course not."

"Who was she any way?" Guy asked, feigning casual curiosity.

The curiosity struck Gavock as natural and he saw no reason for not satisfying it. Besides, nothing could be more reassuring to the boy, he thought, than the truth chanced to be. Between such a career as Floria's and the life Miss Dupont lived the gulf was so wide as to make any connection seem impossible.

So he told the story of Alix Floria, being careful, however, to let fall no hint of the doubt of the body's identity. Indeed, Andrus had convinced him that there was no room for doubt. The fact of the girl's marriage with Andrus he also omitted, feeling that to tell it would be to betray a confidence. He had practically dragged it out of the poor fellow. And as he talked he did not dream that his narrative struck familiarly on his listener's ears, that behind his attentive stare, the boy was saying to himself: "It's all true then, all that Szemere said."

For it was to find that out that he had come and the

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certainly only increased his dread of the publicity the Rumanian had threatened. What was to be done now? What could be done? At the close of the story he rose with some noncommittal word of comment as if to go, but paused irresolute. Where should he go?

Suddenly the memory of some words of Gavock's on the preceding night flashed into his mind. He turned back. He was reluctant to make a confidant of anybody, yet felt the need of counsel. And Gavock had been his father's best friend.

"Mr. Gavock, do you remember what you said to me last night — about coming to you if I ever wanted help? You knew then, did n't you?"

"Knew? Knew what?"

"That Miss Dupont is Alix Floria."

"My dear Guy!"

"You recognized her in the photograph —"

"But I was mistaken —"

"No, you were right. She is Alix Floria. Listen."

Quickly Amarinth told the story of the girl as he had heard it from Hugh Senior and Count Szemere, omitting only the fact of her strange disappearance.

"I've asked her to marry me," he said at last, "and this is what I have to face. If this Rumanian goes to the police the affair will be in all the papers to-morrow morning."

"I fancy that threat was mere bluff," Gavock said. "Such a course would be contrary to all his racial traditions."

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"But suppose it is n't bluff. Could he be stopped by going to Washington? He has wired the Rumanian minister for authority to act in the affair. Would n't it be possible to get at the Rumanian minister?"

"I hardly think it will be necessary."

"But he threatens to go to the police, to accuse Miss Dupont not only of stealing the necklace but of killing the Prince," Guy urged excitedly.

Gavock laughed. "Never! He will never be permitted to drag the indiscretions of any prince, dead or alive, into the public press. It is n't the policy of monarchical governments to publish the moral weaknesses of their aristocracies. The affair is most unfortunate and you have my deepest sympathy, but I feel sure there is no danger of the matter becoming known to the public. And for yourself, you have only to withdraw your offer of marriage —"

"I may as well tell you the truth — we're already married!" And Guy poured out the story of the hurried wedding.

Gavock was astonished and troubled and he deliberated anxiously in his mind. The affair might turn out to be far more serious than he had supposed for his young friend. If Andrus had been mistaken and this girl was Alix Floria, then she was Andrus's wife. Well, that let Guy out. But he would say nothing yet. He must first see Andrus. It was evident that there was a mistake somewhere. Andrus knew more than

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any one else, perhaps he could clear up the mystery. He must find him. Somewhere in a hospital he lay ill.

"Of course I can get an annulment," Guy muttered, "but it's a nasty mess for a man to be in."

Gavock studied the frowning face before him. "You love her, of course?" he asked.

"I did."

"Did! When? Yesterday? Then you do to-day and will to-morrow and many days after. Love is n't killed in an hour, don't think it!"

A wave of feeling crossed his face and he laid his hand on the young man's arm. "Don't be in a hurry. Nothing has been proved. I cannot believe that Miss Dupont is that dancer. Alix Floria was killed. I have the word of a man who knew her well, a man who saw her body. Don't act in haste. Wait."

"There is n't a chance that she is n't Alix Floria, Mr. Gavock, and the best I can hope for is to keep the truth from getting out. Could you do anything at Washington? You said last night that you knew the French ambassador."

"I could reach the Rumanian minister through him, of course, and I shall be glad to do it, if necessary. But I am sure Szemere will not dare to move openly —"

"He's hot after that cross — he'll go any lengths to find it."

"What cross?"

"The missing pendant. Did n't I tell you about it?"

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It's a Greek cross that the Patriarch of Constantinople gave to a prince Xico who was an archbishop, at least, so Szemere says. It's as valuable as the rest of the necklace, and the stones in that are so big it's hard to believe they can be real."

"Did he describe it?"

A stirring in Gavock's mind had prompted the question, an idea, fantastic, incredible, hardly defined.

"I don't remember, but it's probably like the necklace, barbaric looking, set with emerald, rubies, and diamonds, enameled on the other side. But I must go. I must find out what Mr. Senior has done."

"And you'll let me know if I can do anything at Washington? I'm sure, however, that you need not worry about Szemere. And don't make a mistake about the other. Wait until you're sure. Don't throw away a gift of the gods, dear boy."

Guy turned to the door, his jaw set obstinately.

"That's what I did, Guy, twenty years ago, and I've paid for it with twenty years of loneliness. Wait, dear boy, wait!"

"You're very kind," said Guy, flushing uncomfortably. "Good night."

Gavock sighed as the door closed after him. It was a sigh compounded of many kinds of regret: regret for youth's pride and reckless wilfulness, for man's inhumanity to woman, for his own lonely, wasted years. And then he sighed again for the futility of regret, for the uselessness of sighing.

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He took the cross from his pocket. His hands were nervous as he unfolded the handkerchief wrapped about it. He was telling himself that there must be many Greek crosses in the world set in rubies and emeralds and backed by enameling; that the thing was a mere coincidence.

He looked down at the ornament as it lay in his hand. It might well have been a gift from the Patriarch of Constantinople to a princely archbishop. Incredible as the idea appeared, it was less incongruous than Miss Lowther's story. That, he was now convinced, was pure fabrication. At any rate he meant to be sure. The thing had come into his hands by what secret road he could not guess, but it should not go out of his hands until he was satisfied that it was not the pendant sought by Guy's Rumanian.

What would be the quickest, wisest course to follow to that end? Neither Guy nor Hugh Senior could identify the cross. Why not go to Szemere with it? One glance from him would settle the matter. Then there was Andrus. He too had seen the cross, had painted it—

An idea flashed into Gavock's head. He brought the portrait of Alix Floria from his bedroom and studied it closely under the full light of the chandelier. No trace of painted jewels was visible through the over-coat of flesh tint. Yet, he noticed for the first time that the brush work of the neck and bosom was not as free and sure-handed as in the other parts of

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the canvas. Andrus must have done it later with his left hand. In that case the paint beneath must have been well dried.

He hesitated. The portrait was not actually his property and he was reluctant to tamper with it. Yet the damage could easily be repaired by Andrus himself. It was the simplest way to settle his doubts. He could not submit the cross to Guy or Szemere without offering some sort of explanation involving Miss Lowther, and the chance that it was the missing pendant was, after all, a slight one. Far better then to satisfy himself before taking any one into his confidence.

It was after six o'clock, the picture shops would be closed, but he knew that work does not always stop in shops when the front door is locked. And if he let the matter go until morning he might have cause to regret the delay. Opening the telephone book he hunted up an art dealer whom he knew.

Two hours later the picture "restorer" had come and gone. His task had not been easy, but his work though slow had been successful; the necklace lay uncovered and suspended from it hung a cross.

Fortunately for Gavock's purpose the cross was painted with considerable minuteness of detail and it was possible to make out from the tiny points of red and green the arrangements of the stones.

Taking Miss Lowther's cross he held it against the pictured one. In size and shape they were identical.

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The design too, as nearly as he could determine, was the same — a huge diamond in the center and rubies and emeralds alternating to the four points. Still, there was barely a chance, he knew, that the ornament in his hand was the ancient cross sought by the Rumanian Government. However, he would now feel less like a fool at putting that chance to a test. At any rate he could not return the cross to Miss Lowther until he had done so.

This decision reached, he 'phoned Amarinth, found him at home, and announced his intention of calling on him at once. As he hung up the receiver the bell shrilled through the room.

Miss Lowther, he was informed, was waiting below.

CHAPTER XIX

HE found her in the lounge behind the palms where hours before they had agreed to meet. She rose at his approach and stood waiting. She wore a long cloth coat and a close-fitting hat over which a dark veil had been thrown back from her face.

"I suppose you wondered what had become of me," she said at once. "You see, after you left me here I found that I had barely time to keep an appointment with a manager about a stage engagement. I had no idea that it was so late. I hurried off, expecting to be back soon; but I was engaged and had to go to rehearsal at once, to replace some one who is ill. Since then I've been packing — I leave for Chicago to-night. One reason why I did n't come back here was that I don't after all need the money I was going to borrow. Before I leave town, though, I want to thank you and to get my pendant. You have it with you, have n't you?" She held out her hand.

The request took Gavock by surprise. It was the one turn in affairs he had not counted on. But before he had consciously decided how to deal with it, he heard himself telling her that he did not have the cross with him, that it was at his bank.

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"At the bank!" she echoed, frank alarm in her voice. "Then I can't get it to-night?"

"I'm afraid not."

"But I must have it! I'm going away! Surely there's some way of getting it," she urged. "You're a rich man, you must have influence. You could get at the people who control the place."

"My dear young lady, the red tape would be endless. Come, sit down, and let's talk it over sensibly."

She obeyed automatically and he took a seat at her side. He watched her closely, noting that her eyes shifted constantly. This sudden anxiety to recover the cross was as puzzling as her former eagerness to force it on him.

A plan occurred to him.

"It might be possible to get into the bank to-night," he said, "but one would have to have the most urgent reason — a matter of life and death."

"It's almost that to me," she gasped out. "Oh, you must help me! I'm in a terrible position. The cross is n't mine and if I don't return it to-night —"

She turned upon him a look of despairing appeal.

"It's not yours, you say?"

"Surely you suspected that! Why, I did n't even know it was real until you told me! That's my only excuse for taking it. Yes, I took it — stole it. I'm a thief! But it was that or — something worse. For there is something worse for a girl. Oh, you don't know what it's been to drag along here, pretending

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and scheming. You don't dream how hard rich women are and how inhuman. They would n't pay me for dancing for them. They think they're like royalty, that you ought to be flattered to have them look at you. And the men —"

She broke off, shuddering, and turned her eyes away. All the excrescences of manner had fallen from her. For the first time she rang true. Tremulously she went on again with bent head.

"Lately things have been going all wrong with me. I could n't make any money dancing as an amateur so I decided to go on the stage. But I could get nothing to do. I had no money — I did n't know where to turn. Then — I remembered the cross."

"Remembered it?"

"Yes, I'd seen it once; he'd shown it to me and I had happened to see in a mirror where he put it afterwards. It was — well, it does n't matter. But it was n't in a place that locked — that was why I thought it could n't be valuable. Well, I went to his house at an hour when I was sure he would be out and said I'd wait — he's a doctor, you see — and when the servant was gone I got the cross. I meant to pawn it for what I could get, thinking it would tide me over a week or two. But somehow, after I had it, I got frightened. I remembered reading about pawnbrokers identifying people who had pawned stolen things. All day I carried it about and that night I met you. I knew I could trust you and that the cross would be safe with you.

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It was n't until you told me that I had any idea of its value."

"And he knows now that you took it?"

"Yes, he found it out late this afternoon. He accused me and I admitted it. I said I would get it back to-night. He said it was enormously valuable, that to lose it would ruin him. He talked so wildly that I thought he had been drinking. He even took down the 'phone to call the police. He says he will have me arrested if I don't get it back to-night." She threw out her hands imploringly. "What am I to do unless you get it for me? What can I do?"

Gavock was troubled. Her position was more serious than he had imagined, and he could see no justification for himself in forcing her to continue in it. On the other hand, what she had told him had been fuel to the fire of his curiosity concerning the pendant. Besides, he reminded himself, if it were the Rumanian cross the fate of several people hung in the balance. He could not think of her alone.

"Why not tell him the truth? Tell him he can have it back to-morrow."

"He would n't let me leave town unless he had it. He says so. And I must go to-night."

"Then let me tell him for you."

"No, no—he does n't know you have it. He does n't know where I am now. I was afraid he'd follow and make a scene. He can be terrible when

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he's angry. I thought for a moment he was going to kill me! He was wild! I escaped from him by a trick and hurried here; but he knows I am going to Chicago to-night. I promised to meet him at the station and give him the cross. And if I have n't it he won't let me go and I shall lose my engagement. Now you see how I'm placed. You must help me!"

Gavock sprang up. "Wait. I have an idea."

He hurried away but was back in a few minutes with several railroad time-tables. "There are two trains for Chicago to-night," he said, resuming his place at her side. "Which station do you leave from?"

"Pennsylvania, at ten-fifteen."

"Good! There's one at ten from Grand Central. Now this is my plan. It is half-past eight. I have thought of a way by which I may be able to get the pendant for you to-night, before you go —"

"Oh, if you only could!"

"Wait. It's only a chance; don't bank on it," he cautioned. "You'll have to wait here for me. I shall return in time to take you to the train, whether I bring the pendant or not. If I do bring it your troubles will be over, won't they?"

"Yes, oh, yes!"

"If I do not bring it, this is my scheme. I shall take you to the Grand Central and get you a ticket for Chicago on the ten o'clock train. Then I'll hurry over to the Pennsylvania and tell your manager that

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— well, that some friends are taking you over the other road in their private car. That will satisfy him and by the time you reach Chicago to-morrow the pendant will have been returned to the owner. How does that strike you?”

“I can’t think of anything better,” she admitted. “But you don’t intend to give him the pendant yourself? Please don’t. Just send it back without a word to let him know where it comes from.”

“Certainly, if you prefer it. But you must give me the name and address.”

She hesitated, then said: “I’ll give them to you later — if you don’t bring it back to-night. If you do you won’t have to know, you see, and — I’d rather you did n’t.”

“As you like, of course. But come. You can’t wait here. I will arrange for a room for you and you can have an hour’s rest.”

“Rest!”

“You’ll be alone and quiet, at least. And you can depend on me. I shall return in time to take you to the station.”

A few minutes later he saw the elevator start that was to bear her up to her room. Then he jumped into a taxicab for Amaranth’s place.

On the whole he was pleased with the solution he had hit on for Miss Lowther’s plight. He would get in touch with Szemere at once. If the cross was not the one the Rumanian sought, then he could simply

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turn it over to the girl and be done with the matter. If it was the one Szemere was after — well, Miss Lowther would travel to Chicago by the New York Central.

CHAPTER XX

THREE quarters of an hour later Gavock was closing the interview he had sought with Count Szemere. It had taken place in Hugh Senior's library in the presence of Hugh and Amarinth. Before showing the pendant Gavock had exacted from Szemere a description of the one missing from the necklace, and the readiness with which the Rumanian supplied this was proof enough of his good faith. And his description had been so accurate, including irregularities in the cutting of certain stones — details Gavock had not noticed, but now found on examination to be facts — that no doubt as to the identification was possible.

The cross lay on the table about which the four men were seated. Gavock was speaking.

"I understand then, Count, that with the recovery of the necklace and the pendant, all interest in the affairs of Miss Dupont on the part of you or your Government will instantly cease?"

"Perfectly. Prince Lascar is dead. To know how or why he died will not bring him to life again."

He turned to Hugh. "I regret, Mr. Senior, if my great need has made me this afternoon to lack indul-

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gence for you and your ward. My whole future was depending on this cross and I have feared that through you I should lose it. Regarding my knowledge of the former career of Miss Dupont—"I assure you that you may rely with perfect confidence on my discretion."

"Thank you," Guy said, and Hugh bowed.

"To-morrow," continued Szemere, "I shall take measures to establish the claims of Prince Xico to the jewels. I shall communicate with you as soon as I am prepared to do so."

"I trust you quite understand my position in this affair," Gavock said. "The person through whom the cross came into my hands does not claim to own it and is, I am convinced, ignorant of its history. The name of this person must remain my secret. That condition you have already accepted."

"Perfectly."

"There is, however, a person who does claim ownership, and what the attitude of this person will be I am not in a position to say. I confess that I find myself awkwardly placed. I shall have to proceed with caution and must be allowed to do so in the way that seems best to me. Since the cross is the property of Prince Xico it will be restored to him. In the meantime, of course, it remains in my keeping."

"But certainly," said Szemere. "It is most valuable, however, and I take the liberty of imploring you to have great care of it."

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Gavock had picked up the cross and was folding it away once more in a handkerchief of his own with which he had replaced Miss Lowther's.

"If I may suggest," Hugh remarked, "the Cosmopolis Bank keeps its vaults open all night for women who want to turn in their jewels after wearing them. You might take the cross there if you want to get it out of your hands."

"An excellent idea," said Gavock. "I'll go there at once."

He put the ornament in his pocket and carefully buttoned his coat over it.

"Good night, Mr. Senior. Good night, Guy. I hope the end of your troubles is near."

"I can never thank you, sir," Guy stammered.

"You owe me no thanks, my dear boy. The whole thing has come about without my volition. Providence picked me for an instrument, that's all. But don't forget that I am always ready when you need me."

His cab waited at the curb and behind it stood Szemere's. The two men parted with brief farewells and were presently on their way to their respective destinations. Guy had remained behind.

Having stopped to leave the cross at the Cosmopolis Bank, Gavock was somewhat delayed and found Miss Lowther anxiously awaiting his return. In the face of her disappointment at his failure to bring the pendant, however, he was glad that so little time was

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given her to bewail the fact. He felt enough like a brute and a double-dealer as it was.

"You must give me that name and address now," he reminded her, and reluctantly she did so.

"The name is Dr. Jules Aubert, and the address 80 East 54th Street."

"I'll write that down," said Gavock. "Will you spell it? Ah, yes, thank you — a French name."

"Yes, he is French."

"Come now — we must hurry."

She caught her train to Chicago by a narrow margin and as he watched it pull out of the station Gavock fervently hoped he had seen the last of her. In accordance with his plan he immediately dashed down to the Pennsylvania station and hurrying to the gate for the Chicago train inquired for the manager of the theatrical company that was aboard. Miss Lowther had said he would probably be waiting near the gate to see that all his charges went through.

His question of the gate-keeper was answered at once by a fat man standing near.

"I'm him — what do you want?"

"A member of your company, Miss Lowther —"

"Lowther!" The manager grabbed his arm eagerly. "Know anything about her?"

Gavock opened his mouth to reply but at the moment he felt some one brush up from behind him and wheeling he met the black eyes of the stranger with the Van Dyke beard whom he had encountered that after-

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noon at his hotel. So that was Dr. Aubert! Caution was in order.

"I wanted to say good-by to her. Is she on the train?" he substituted for the words he had meant to speak.

With a grunt of disappointment the manager dropped the arm he had seized.

"No, she ain't, but she ought to be. I've got nervous prostration standing here waiting for her. No more society dames for mine. Never again!"

Gavock listened to the disgorging of rage and disgust, but Dr. Aubert, who had doubtless heard it before, walked off. Looking after him, Gavock was again struck by the curiously free movements of his lithe body.

"One minute more," warned the gateman, and Gavock seized the chance to deliver Miss Lowther's message.

"Why in h—— could n't you say so before?" demanded the theatrical man.

"Too many listening," said Gavock with a glance toward Aubert, who was again approaching.

"Oh — I see!"

"What does he see, I wonder?" thought Gavock as the gate clanged shut and he was left alone.

On his way to the cab-stand he passed quite close to Aubert and received from the Frenchman a malevolent glare.

"How am I to deal with that gentleman to-mor-

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row?" he considered. "I'm thankful, at least, that I shan't be called upon to meet him on a dark night on a lonely road. No wonder the girl was in a blue funk. He might be the devil himself."

With a sigh of relief he sank back on his taxi seat. The day had been strenuous and he was glad he was going home to bed. Staring out at the street lamps which flitted by, he spoke aloud the question which was rapping at the back of his head.

"Now, how does this Dr. Jules Aubert happen to think he owns the Cross of Kemesvar?"

CHAPTER XXI

WITH the departure of Gavock and Count Szemere from Hugh Senior's house, an awkward silence fell on the two men left together in the library. The same thought was in the mind of each but both found it hard to utter. The disappearance of Marie had not been mentioned during the interview just closed, not so much from any intention of concealing it from Gavock, as because Szemere, the cross within reach, had not broached the subject. His goal sighted, his interest in the girl had ceased. He no longer needed her.

Finally Guy broke the pause. "Has she come back?"

"No."

"It's nearly ten o'clock; it's been five hours."

"Yes."

"What can we do?"

"I don't know."

Hugh rose as he spoke and crossed to the fireplace. "Sit down here, won't you. I want to talk to you."

As he stood looking down into the fire the spurts of flame that rose from the logs revealed the deepened shadows in his face.

"I don't know where she went nor why, but I know

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she will come back," he said. "When she does — what then?"

Amarinth looked away and stirred in his chair but said nothing.

"It will be up to you, you know. With Szemere eliminated the question becomes a personal one between you and her. You are married, but under the circumstances it won't be hard for you to regain your freedom, if that is what you want."

"You mean an annulment?"

"So you've thought of it already?"

"Can you blame me?"

A log, burnt through, fell from the irons, sending out a spray of red sparks. Amarinth shoved his chair back to avoid them, while Hugh caught up the tongs and replaced the fallen ends upon the irons. The noise of their own movements prevented the two men from hearing the step which at that moment sounded in the hall.

Marie Dupont appeared in the doorway. She paused, staring at the backs of the men as though waiting for them to turn. Her figure drooped wearily and her eyes, dark-rimmed and half-closed, gave to her face an expression of utter exhaustion.

"I don't see how you can blame me," Guy declared as his companion dropped back to his seat. "No man would want — such a woman for his wife."

"Then you are satisfied that Marie is this Alix Floria?"

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"How can I doubt it? God knows I would if I could. But what doubt is there?"

"There is the girl herself," Hugh returned quietly. "As I know her and as you know her, she is all a man could wish a woman to be, is n't she?"

"Yes; but lots of women have deceived men that way. How can you know what she was or was not before you knew her?"

"But the idea is monstrous, Amarinth! I don't care what appearances may seem to prove—it is n't the first time they've lied. Stop, man, and think—think what you accuse her of! You don't realize it, that's evident. This Floria was notorious. The theater she appeared in was notorious. She drew her audience, not by her dancing, but by her love-affairs. And you are willing to believe that Marie was ever that woman? By heaven, the idea would be laughable if it were not so horrible!"

Guy remained silent. The girl in the door stood now as if made of stone.

"It is n't possible—it is n't possible!" Hugh went on. "No woman could so completely change her nature."

"Oh, what's the good of generalizing?" Guy demanded with a tinge of irritation in his voice. "The facts are there. You can't get away from them—at least, I can't. Gavock recognized her, so did Szemere. There's the exact agreement in dates, there's the necklace and the coat. And there's her

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dancing — don't forget that! Besides, where is she now? Why did she go away if not to avoid Sze-mere?"

"Perhaps to avoid you."

"Me?"

"You came here, her husband, and you did n't speak to her, nor touch her hand, nor even look at her except with suspicion. I know. I watched you. What must she have thought or felt?"

"I did look at her and she would n't meet my eyes. She was afraid. She had deceived me. She had no right to marry me knowing what she did about herself."

"Knowing! I tell you she knew nothing but what I know, not as much. Her mind is a blank as far as her past life is concerned. Suppose she was this dancer once, she does n't remember it. She does n't remember one thing—nothing she said or did or thought before the moment when she woke up in my aunt's house seven years ago. Whatever her life may have been her consciousness is as free from it as if it had never been. If there was ever in her mind the memory of any shameful thing the loss of memory left her mind clean of it."

"Did it leave her body clean?"

Hugh started up with a cry of anger and indignation.

"Amarinth, you're a —"

He bit back the word on his tongue and curbed his

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fury. "Don't you love her at all?" he asked after a moment.

"No!" Guy retorted sharply. "I may be whatever you were going to call me, but I can't love a woman I don't respect."

Their hostile eyes clung together. In the stillness the clock on the mantel ticked loudly. The girl had not moved.

"It's going to be hard for her," Hugh said at last. "She loves you. Try to remember that."

Amarinth's frown deepened but he made no answer.

"She loves you," Hugh repeated. "Whatever you decide to do, remember that and spare her as much as —"

"Hugh, stop!"

The cry came from the door. Both men wheeled.

"Don't humble yourself or me to *him*!"

"Marie!" Hugh crossed to her. "Where have you been?"

"I'll tell you when he's gone," she answered. "It does n't concern him, where I have been. Nothing I have ever done concerns him."

She paused and took a step toward Amarinth.

"I've heard all that you said about me and I'm glad I heard it. Perhaps I am what you believe — I don't know. But whatever I am now or have ever been in the past, however notorious or vile, I still have one thing to thank God for. I am not your wife!"

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Guy's head shot out with a startled stare. "What do you mean?" he muttered.

"I mean that our marriage last night was not legal."

"Not legal?"

"I was already married. My husband has just died — in my arms."

On the final words she swayed and would have fallen if Hugh had not caught her. At his touch she roused herself and clung to his arm with both hands like a frightened child.

"Ask him to go! Please ask him to go!" she begged.

Guy did not move. "I don't understand," he said. "What does she mean? Is that true?"

"Yes, yes, it's true. Please go away."

"Won't you explain —"

"What does it matter to you as long as you're free? Please, please, go away."

She was trembling and her breath came in gasps. Hugh waved Guy to the door. "You'd better go, I think," he said.

But Guy remained there irresolute, until, reaching a decision, he started for the door.

"Wait! I have something of yours!" she arrested him suddenly.

He turned back to her. She drew away from Hugh's supporting arms and ripping her gloves off, unbuttoned her coat and let it slip into his hands. Then she felt within her dress and brought out a rib-

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bon on which were strung the rings Amaranth had given her the night before. With trembling fingers she untied the loop that held it secure about her neck and drawing off the rings laid them on the table between them. Then leaning forward she pushed them across to him.

"Take them, please."

She did not look at him, nor he at her. The eyes of both were on the rings, the empty symbols of their mutual faith and love. He made no move to pick them up, but looked at Hugh.

"I want to speak to her alone," he said.

"No, no! I've nothing to say to you."

"You owe me some sort of explanation!"

"There's nothing to explain. There are your rings. Please go."

"Very well then, I will," Guy declared shortly. He snatched the rings up and without another word turned and left the house.

The outer door slammed loudly behind him and at the sound the girl recoiled as if she had been struck. Hugh led her to a chair by the fire.

"You are cold. Your hands are like ice," he said.

"I'm so tired," she moaned. "I walked and walked. I thought I should never get here. You see, it was this way —"

"Wait. Don't talk yet. Just rest here until you feel better."

He hurried from the room and returned at once with



"I am so tired," she whispered. "I walked and walked—"



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some brandy in a glass. She coughed as she drank it, but presently the effect of the stimulant became apparent in slower, quieter breathing. Suddenly, with a start, she sat up.

"How is Aunt Alicia?"

"All right. She's asleep. She does n't even know you've been away."

"I was so afraid she would worry about me. I wanted to 'phone but I had no money."

She shivered and held her hands out to the warmth of the fire. On his knees beside her Hugh took her hands in his and chafed them vigorously and she leaned back with a tremulous sigh, soothed by his warm, strong touch.

"When I left the house this afternoon I meant to be gone only five or ten minutes. I felt that I must get out where I could breathe. It was as you thought, as you told him just now. It was his coming here and not speaking to me, hardly looking at me — I did n't know what that could mean. All day I had waited for word from him. Of course, I knew you did n't know how serious the matter was to me, that we were married. That troubled me too. I wanted to tell you last night, but I had promised him —"

"Yes, he told me. I understand. Don't worry about that."

"It was so ungrateful to you and Aunt Alicia. I shall never forgive myself. But I must tell you about to-night. You see the suspense all day had been ter-

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rible. Then your coming here, and with that other man. It was all so odd, I did n't understand. And when you went into the study and I went up-stairs again I felt that I could not sit still and do nothing. I thought if I could get out into the cold air and walk a little I might feel better. I did n't say anything to any one, I expected to come right back. But — at the corner I met Miss Niklova."

"Niklova?"

"The Russian girl who plays the violin for our dancing class. She stopped me, she was on her way here to see me, she said. Some one was dying and wanted me, some one who had known me in Paris and thought me dead. I told her she must be mistaken but she would n't listen. She was terribly excited. There was no time to waste, she said. I said I must come back here first and leave word, or I must telephone. She would n't let me. He was dying, she said. I did n't know what to do. What she said might be true. There must be people in the world who once knew me and now believe me dead. She almost dragged me along the street while I was wondering what to do. 'He's dying, he's dying,' she kept telling me, over and over."

"Did n't she tell you his name?"

"Not then. 'Wait, you'll see him,' she said when I asked her. We took the elevated, she had tickets. I had no money. I had taken no purse, but only my key. Well, we rode and rode and when at last we got

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off we walked east. It was getting dark and I could see the lights of the boats on the river. We went into a house and up-stairs — up and up and up. Then we went into a room —”

She stopped, shuddering, and covered her face with her hands.

“Oh, that room, Hugh! It was so bare and cold and desolate. And he was lying there on a bed — the man I had come to see. Another man, a doctor, was sitting by the bed, and when we went in he and Miss Niklova walked to a corner of the room to talk and left me standing there by the bed. I looked down. He was lying on his side and I could n’t see his face well and I thought he was asleep. Then he moved and spoke. ‘Alix — Alix,’ he said in a kind of moan, and then louder as if he were calling some one: ‘Alix! Alix!’

“I stood waiting, not knowing what to do. Then Miss Niklova spoke to me sharply: ‘Answer him!’ but I could n’t — I could n’t speak. She came over to the bed and touched him. ‘Alix is here,’ she said. ‘Look, she’s here.’ At that he raised his head and stared at her as if he did not understand, and she pointed at me and then he turned and saw me.”

Marie shivered again and drawing her hands from Hugh’s she passed them nervously over her face. He stood up, watching her anxiously.

“Did you know him?” he asked, his voice strained.

She shook her head. “He was like a stranger to

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me, a man I had never seen before. But — he knew me.”

“What did he say?”

“He did n’t speak, just looked at me for a long time. I did n’t move. There was such a queer look in his eyes that I could n’t stir. It was as if any moment he would speak to me. Suddenly he raised up in the bed and stretched out an arm toward me — his right arm — and I saw that he had no hand —”

Hugh gave an exclamation of surprise.

“What is it?” she asked.

“I’ll tell you afterwards. Go on. He stretched his arm out, you said.”

“Yes. I saw that he was reaching for me and I stepped a little nearer, near enough for him to touch me. But he did not touch me. He pulled back his arm and lay down again. ‘I’m dreaming,’ he said. ‘I’m dreaming,’ but he did n’t take his eyes from my face. Then all at once he sat up again and put out the other arm and when his hand touched my hand he gave a sort of gasping scream and fell back unconscious.

“The doctor hurried to him and Miss Niklova cried out to me: ‘He’s dead, he’s dead — you’ve killed him!’ But the doctor told her he had only fainted from the shock of finding that I was real and not a vision. ‘Who is he?’ I asked, and then — Miss Niklova told me.”

“Told you he was your husband?”

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Marie nodded and sat dumbly gazing at her tightly clasped hands as they lay in her lap.

"What else did she tell you?"

"I hardly know — she was so excited, so miserable. What a cruel thing life can be, Hugh. She loved him."

"What was his name? Tell me what she said to you," Hugh urged.

Briefly she pieced together the facts she had learned from Irma Niklova: of Andrus's life in the tenement, of his struggle to train his left hand to replace the right, lost in an accident; of the portrait which the Russian girl had recognized as hers, of the gown so like the one she had danced in, of what Andrus had said of her, that she had been a dancer and was now dead. He had taken the portrait away that afternoon and sold it to get money because he was ill and was going to a hospital, but when he came back to leave the money with Irma he had fallen unconscious and she had put him to bed. Then the doctor had come and declared that it was a question of hours. And the sick man had called for Alix — Alix, his wife, and in his delirium he had talked of the portrait, Alix's portrait. It was that which gave the Russian girl her clue and she had determined to bring to him the woman he loved before he died.

"She said cruel things to me," Marie went on. "Of course she did n't understand. She thought I had deserted him in his misfortune, that I was deceiv-

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ing every one now, pretending to be somebody I was not. I could n't explain; there was no time and she would n't have believed me. Besides, what did it matter what she thought of me? All I could think of was that here at last was some one out of the past I had forgotten, some one who loved me and had grieved for me all these years. Whatever I could do to make amends must be done. If I was his wife I must act as a wife would act. At last he regained consciousness. But he was very weak and lay quite still, noticing nothing. The doctor watched him, feeling his wrist. Miss Niklova knelt in a corner and prayed to an image. Not seeing what else I could do, I knelt by the bed and waited."

"Poor child!" said Hugh.

"At last he opened his eyes and saw me. He was whiter now and weaker and I don't think he knew where he was, for he accepted my presence as natural and, believing that I was dead, he would n't have done that if he had been conscious, would he?"

"Did he say anything?"

"Very little—just the name, Alix, over and over. He smiled at me and kept putting out his right arm to touch me as if he had forgotten that the hand was gone. All at once his expression changed, his eyes looked blind. Then he spoke. 'It's getting dark, Alix,' he said. 'I can't see to paint any more. Kiss me, sweetheart, and hurry home, or they will scold you.'"

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Marie broke off and hesitated. "He lifted his head a little and I — I — put my arm about his neck and — kissed him. I felt his lips meet mine, then his head fell back — he was dead."

She sobbed as she finished speaking and bowing her head on the arm of her chair she wept uncontrollably.

"Poor child, poor child," Hugh repeated pityingly.

She looked up, her face streaming with tears. "When I saw that he was gone I cried out and jumped up. The doctor said it was all over and Miss Niklova screamed and ordered me to leave. 'He's mine now,' she said. 'Go back to your fine home and fine friends. You're a cruel, wicked woman.' I tried to reason with her, to explain. She would n't listen. She pushed me from the room and told me to explain to my friends. She was crazed with grief. It was terrible and pitiful. In the hall the doctor asked for my address. He said he would let me know about the funeral if I wished. When I had given him the address he went back into the room. He believed what she had told him about me and looked at me as if I were some loathsome creature. But it did n't seem to matter what he thought — nothing seemed to matter.

"The hall was very dimly lighted and I had to feel my way down the steps, then through other dark halls, and down more steps until I was again in the street. It was night. To the east I saw the lights along the river, to the west the tracks of the elevated. That was the way home, I thought, then I remembered that I

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had no money, that I should have to walk. So I went along the street where the elevated ran —”

“ You walked home! Why did n’t you take a cab? ”

“ There were none, for one thing, and if there had been I should n’t have taken one. What right have I to comfort and luxury? Everywhere about me as I walked I saw poverty and wretchedness; back in that room I had left poverty and sorrow; what had I left behind me that morning seven years ago? That was what I kept asking myself. Perhaps I had had parents, sisters and brothers, perhaps,— a child.”

“ Marie! ”

“ How can I know, Hugh, how can I know? ”

“ You were nothing but a child yourself.”

“ I had a husband. How can I tell that somewhere in the world there is n’t a little child, poor and unfortunate, or maybe — in its grave. That is the thought that won’t leave me. My husband was a stranger to me, my child would be a stranger too. I feel as if I were a monster, a thing without humanity. Think of it! All these years I’ve lived without a thought of those who might be grieving for me.”

“ That was not your fault, dear child: you had lost all memory of them. You were questioned again and again about home and family; you could tell nothing. Inquiries were made and as far as we could learn no one was trying to find you. You had not even been reported as missing.”

“ Perhaps they were very poor. The poor are so

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helpless. Perhaps they thought I had meant to leave them. Perhaps they thought I was dead."

"We know now that they thought you were dead, Marie. They thought you were murdered."

"Murdered!"

"Listen, my dear."

Hugh drew a chair close to hers and holding her hands in his he told her the story of Alix Floria as he had heard it from Szemere, softening or omitting the harsher details only. She sat, her eyes on his, without speaking or moving until he had ended. Then she drew a long, labored breath and turned away.

"That was how he knew then?" she asked.

Hugh nodded, understanding that she meant Amarinth.

"And Mr. Gavock recognized me too?"

"Yes. Does nothing come back to you, Marie, of what I've told you?"

"No. But why did you never tell me of the necklace, never let me see it?"

"You seemed such a child and the thing seemed so tawdry. You see, I had no idea that it was valuable."

She looked past him for several moments. "Where was I going that morning when your car struck me?" she asked suddenly.

"No one knows that."

"I was wearing the coat of — that dancer, and the necklace. But the other things I wore could not have been hers."

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"No."

"They were mine, then, and I was a working-girl and not a dancer. But what could I have been doing with that coat and necklace? Had I stolen them? Was I running away?"

The questions were not addressed to Hugh, but to herself, and after them she paused as if for answers. "No," she said suddenly, and then again: "No."

"I was a dancer then—in a theater—in Paris," she went on after a while, disjointedly, stopping as if to measure the significance of each detail. "A prince was in love with me—and he gave me jewels to wear—they belonged to his family—every one knew about them—it was shameful for me to wear them—but I did—I was proud of them."

Again she stopped and stared ahead unseemingly, as though listening intently for an answer.

"I never did that—never!" she said at last, with a vehemence that startled Hugh.

"I'm sure of that," he answered earnestly.

"Something tells me that I was never that girl—something here." She pressed her hand against her breast.

"My heart tells me also, Marie."

"He believed it."

She stood up now and stared into the fire. Hugh watched her face, so unlike itself, and he longed to comfort her, but could not find the words. His love

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surged to his lips, but to speak of that at such a moment would have been an offense.

"Well, he is free now. And I am free. That is true, is n't it?"

"Yes, virtually," he answered. "But there will be a legal form to go through. As we have no positive proof of your identity or of your marriage to this Andrus an annulment of the marriage last night will be necessary. That is, unless you and he should reconsider —"

"I never want to see him again!"

Her frame shook as with a strong physical revulsion. "But you must not think I blame him. I should not have married him. I deceived him and I've been punished."

"Don't brood over what is past and done," Hugh begged. "Try to forget, and after a while you will forget. And some day love will come to you again, some other man will come into your life and —"

"Go out of it again, as he did. No one would believe in me in the face of everything — no one but you."

Her eyes, filled with grateful tears, rested on his face, and they remained so looking at each other.

"But I can't go on like this," she said at last. "Don't you see that I can't? I must know who I am, who I have been, and what? I can't live in ignorance any longer. No matter what the truth is I must know it. And there's only one way — an operation."

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"No, no!"

"I shall never have peace until I know the truth. I must know what my real place in life is and take it, no matter what it is or where it calls me. I have no right here. I live in comfort while those who love me are in want. The doctors said an operation was the only way —"

"But it's dangerous. It might mean — death."

"Since there's no other way I must take the risk. You will help me, won't you?"

"Of course, but —"

"Take me to a doctor. Take me to-morrow — to-morrow, Hugh! I want it over. I want to be myself, my real self, no matter what that is. Will you take me to a doctor to-morrow?"

She had flung out her hands pleadingly. He caught them in his and held them. "Listen, Marie," he said, "there's another way. We'll go to Paris and try again to find your people. We have clues to work with now. We'll find people who knew Alix Floria. There must be many of them, it has been only seven years. Why should we take Szemere's word alone? There must be other people who knew her better — her maid, for instance. We'll find her. There are many things we can do. Perhaps we shall find some one that you will remember."

"What's the use?" she asked listlessly. "I didn't recognize the man who was my husband —"

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"He may never have been your husband — you may never have seen him before."

"I had seen the necklace and the coat I was wearing and I don't remember them. No; that way I should only know, at most, what others thought of me, not what I thought of myself. I shall never know anything I want to know until my memory returns. I must try an operation."

"I can't let you!" Hugh protested. "You are excited now and overwrought and can't judge things fairly. Count Szemere will get his cross and necklace and we shall hear no more of him. Your marriage will be quietly annulled, then we shall go to Paris."

"And if we find out nothing?"

"Well, what will it matter? We've lived happily together, the three of us, have n't we?"

"Yes."

His hands closed round hers with a firmer pressure as he went on. "And some day you may come to care for another man, some one who knows you as we do and believes in you and — and loves you as — I love you."

"Hugh!"

"Give me the right to protect you, dear. Let me give you my name. It need never go further than that unless you wish it. I promise. You may trust me."

She drew back a little and he let go her hands. "Oh, oh," she murmured in distress.

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"Don't be unhappy about it. Don't let it bother you. It's all right," he assured her huskily. "I did n't mean you to know. But that's how it is with me, dear. It's been so for years."

"I did n't think — I did n't dream —" She gave a little cry of pain. "Oh, I must have been cursed when I was born! I bring unhappiness to every one."

"Marie, don't say that!"

"But it's true! There's John Andrus and Miss Niklova and Guy and now you. And others somewhere in the world, perhaps. But I can't bear it any longer. I must know who I am!"

"Very well, then," he agreed suddenly. "I will take you to a doctor to-morrow and hear what he advises. Sterling told me the other day of a new man who has done some wonderful things in intracranial surgery at one of the hospitals. He gave me the address, thinking I might want him to see you. I'll telephone in the morning and make an appointment. But now you must go to bed and sleep. Promise me that."

"I'll try."

"Life will look all bright again some day and soon."

She sighed as though he had asked too much of her credulity. At the door she paused and looked at him sadly.

"I'm sorry," she faltered.

"Don't be, dear; I'm not," he answered.

He listened until the sound of her steps had died away in the upper hall. Then, entering his study, he

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searched in his desk for the address of the surgeon whom the family physician, Dr. Sterling, had so strongly recommended.

Soon he came upon the card on which he had written it.

“Dr. Jules Aubert, 80 East 54th Street.”

CHAPTER XXII

GAVOCK awoke late and his first conscious thought was the one with which he had fallen asleep: how was he to deal with Aubert?

His preferred course was to do nothing — just wait and see what happened — but he did not feel free to follow it. He must take no chances on Miss Lowther's name becoming involved in the affair. He had deceived her for Guy's sake — that had been unavoidable and he did not regret it; but now his first duty was to shield her. If Aubert believed himself to be the owner of the cross he might make trouble for the girl as he had threatened and that possibility must be guarded against. Accordingly he must communicate with Dr. Aubert and forestall any action on his part.

On the other hand there was a probability — a strong one, Gavock felt — that the doctor had come by the cross dishonestly, that he had perhaps been concerned in its disappearance seven years ago. In that case he would not dare move openly to recover it and Miss Lowther was safe from public action on his part. But he would assuredly go to her about it and she would send him to Gavock.

Now, as to his own course Gavock had not made up

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his mind. He had the night before declined to tell Szemere how the cross had come into his possession, but he might later not find it wise to persist in silence. The cross had been stolen in Paris and he had been in Paris at that time. It could easily be learned that he knew Andrus and that the artist had called on him the day after his arrival in America and had brought to him — what, but a portrait of Alix Floria! That that fact was without bearing on his possession of the cross, who would believe? Andrus would at once come under suspicion and be traced to his hospital cot. And had he not promised the poor fellow that his obscurity should not be disturbed?

It was quite on the cards then that he would be forced to tell how he got the cross and this would direct inquiry to Dr. Jules Aubert. And just how this would result for the Frenchman, Gavock had no idea. If the latter had come honestly by the cross, all well and good; if not — well, Gavock did not fancy himself in the rôle of thief catcher. Aubert should have fair warning.

After several false starts he finally wrote the following note:

Dr. Jules Aubert:

Dear Sir: I regret to inform you that the jeweled pendant, left in my care to be sent to you this morning, has been seen and identified as the famous Cross of Kemesvar by Count Egon Szemere of the Rumanian legation, by whom a formal claim has been entered according to law, which

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prevents my forwarding the ornament to you. It is now deposited at a bank and will not be removed until the question of its ownership is determined beyond possibility of doubt. Every opportunity will be given you to prove your right to it and communications to the address above will reach me promptly.

Sincerely yours,

ROGER GAVOCK.

Written and sealed, Gavock put the letter in his pocket. He would send it by special messenger as soon as he had breakfasted.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE white-garbed attendant of Dr. Aubert's office appeared at the door of the waiting-room, meeting with a deprecatory smile the inquiring and impatient glances which greeted her. Then she retired again to the consulting-room.

The doctor was very late. The chances were, Miss Birkett knew, that he would not see any of the waiting patients when he arrived, being scheduled to operate at the hospital in twenty minutes. Opening a cabinet that contained surgical instruments spread upon glass shelves, she wheeled a small, glass-topped table within reach and placed upon it such of the instruments as she knew would be needed for the coming operation. The doctor could then determine at a glance the additional ones required.

Her selection finished, she closed the cabinet, and was just turning away when the loud shutting of the house door struck on her ear. The next moment the door leading from the hall to the consulting-room was opened and her employer entered.

He strode past her without a word and picked up a small pile of letters lying on the desk.

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"This all the mail?" he asked sharply, dropping the letters again.

"Yes, sir."

"No telephones — telegrams — nothing?"

"No, sir."

She handed him the sheet upon which his engagements for the day were listed. His glance ran down it, resting finally upon the hand that held it. It was trembling.

Miss Birkett had moved over to the table beside the cabinet. "I've selected the instruments," she said. "Will you look them over?"

He jerked his shaking hand to his side. "I'll not operate to-day. 'Phone them to give the case to Dr. Mason — say I'll explain later."

"Yes, sir," she replied, astonishment betrayed in her tone.

"And tell them to cancel me for to-morrow and next day. I — I've been called to Chicago."

"Yes, sir." She started for the door. "The waiting-room is full."

"Send them away."

"Yes, sir." She shot him a furtive glance of wonder.

He caught it and frowned.

"Wait," he snapped and looked at his watch. "I'll see as many as I have time for. Send some one in; then 'phone as I directed."

"Yes, sir."

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In the outer room Marie Dupont was waiting with Mrs. Thorley and Hugh. It had been decided that Hugh should first see the doctor alone and give him the history of the case, after which Mrs. Thorley would bring Marie in for the examination. This would shorten the ordeal for the girl. Being among the earliest arrivals their turn for consultation came soon.

Hugh made his story brief, giving only such details as bore on the pathological aspects of the case. Dr. Aubert listened attentively, asked a few pertinent questions, then observed :

“I should say that under the circumstances your wisest course will be to let well enough alone.”

“We have acted on that belief for seven years,” Hugh answered. “But my ward now feels that it is her duty to discover her identity for the sake of others — parents or relatives.”

“But surely her identity could have been established through inquiry.”

“Every effort in that direction failed.”

“I see. Well, the case is a rare one but it is not without precedent. The condition was caused either by physical injury or mental shock. If by the latter an operation would, of course, do no good. A strong mental shock might — say, for instance, the sudden sight of a person whom she had known well in the forgotten period of her life.”

“We have no means of providing such a shock.”

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"If, on the other hand, there was a physical injury, a blow on the head, causing pressure on the brain tissue, an operation which would remove that pressure might effect a cure. But you say that the physician who examined her after the accident, and the specialists who saw her later, found no evidence of such a blow."

"So they said."

"Of course, I could convince myself on that point only by a personal examination. I do not wish to disparage the knowledge or skill of my colleagues, but it is possible they were mistaken. We are all human. How long has it been since an examination of the skull was made? "

"About six years."

"Indeed! In that case it is possible that your car did strike the head, but in such a way as to press heavily upon it without causing an abrasion so that the injury was not apparent — at that time."

"I hardly think that is possible," Hugh replied. "The car struck her on the body and threw her to one side of the road. She was badly bruised just above the waist."

"Probably you are right but — you may be wrong. If there was such pressure as I have suggested, after six years there might be evident some slight thickening of the scalp at that point or a hardly appreciable indentation of the bony structure. If such were found to be

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the case I might advise an operation, though I am not sure that I should, as such operations are always dangerous and to be avoided except when the injury has caused a distinct loss of mental power. However, we are only speculating. Do you wish me to make an examination?"

"By all means. I will bring my ward in," Hugh said.

He opened the door and beckoned Mrs. Thorley and Marie to come in. At the same moment the attendant, Miss Birkett, entered the consulting-room from the hall and handed the doctor a letter.

"A messenger just brought it," she said. "He's waiting to see if there's an answer."

Dr. Aubert tore the note open. It was the one from Gavock. As he took in the opening sentences he gave a violent start and the fine, crisp paper of the Crustacea rasped in his tense fingers. His back was toward the door through which Marie Dupont was following Mrs. Thorley into the office. They advanced as far as the table on which the surgical instruments lay and at sight of the shining tools the girl drew back with a shudder. Hugh closed the door and they all stood waiting for the doctor to finish the reading of his note.

"Any answer, Doctor?" came presently in Miss Birkett's professional voice.

Aubert was staring at the paper in his hand, and at the question he threw his head up sharply and turned.

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"No," he said, adding with a wave of his hand toward chairs as he began fitting the note back into its wrapper; "Please, be seated."

Mrs. Thorley sat down at once and Hugh stepped toward Marie to place a chair for her; but the strangeness of her demeanor brought him up short.

She was standing rigid, her head thrust forward. Her eyes narrowed upon Aubert's face, glittered with hate. Her right arm was crooked and she held the clenched hand pressed hard against her breast. The whole attitude and expression of her body was so amazing, so unlike her usual self that for astonishment Hugh could not move.

Then Aubert turned again to them and on the instant the girl sprang forward.

"*Assassin!*" she screamed with the hissing nasal pronunciation that the word has in French, and her right hand shot out, showing the glint of steel.

One look, and with a choking cry Aubert recoiled.

"Look out!" Hugh called and sprang for Marie.

But before he had touched her or she had reached Aubert she stopped short in her leap, as though a bullet had pierced her heart. Her outstretched arm fell heavily, she reeled, and would have gone to the floor if Hugh had not caught her. From her inert hand a surgical knife clattered noisily.

Instantly the room was in commotion. Mrs. Thorley was talking excitedly; Miss Birkett, gone to dismiss the waiting messenger, came hurrying back; a man in

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the waiting-room opened the door and others crowded in behind him.

Hugh carried Marie to a couch. She was limp and unconscious.

"She has fainted," Miss Birkett said, and dashed water in her face.

"Marie! Marie!" Hugh called and shook the inert form gently. But neither sound nor touch roused her.

"Where's the doctor?" he demanded, staring about the circle of curious faces. "Get the doctor," he ordered the attendant.

She too searched the room with a wondering glance, then ran out.

A tense silence fell. No one moved.

Then Miss Birkett's step was heard returning. She stumbled in, her eyes wide with surprise.

"The doctor's gone!" she stammered.

"Gone!" Hugh cried, and sprang to his feet.

She nodded. "His overcoat and hat were in the hall a minute ago. Now they're gone. He's left the house."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE afternoon had passed. On her bed in Hugh Senior's house lay the unconscious form of Marie Dupont, just as seven years before it had lain in Mrs. Thorley's house near Paris. Beside the bed stood Mrs. Thorley, Hugh Senior, and the family physician, Dr. Sterling.

"She is sleeping now and sleep is the best thing possible after the shock she has had," said Dr. Sterling, just as Dr. Vining had said it once. Then he went away and Hugh and his aunt sat down again to wait and watch for the awakening.

What would it bring, that awakening, Hugh asked himself over and over. Three outcomes were possible, the doctor had said. Her mental condition might show no change from what it had been for the last seven years; she might awake with the memory of her early life recovered but with no recollection of anything following the accident in Paris; then again, she might recall everything.

Everything! And what was everything? He looked at her face, sweet, innocent, as he had always known it. It was that knowledge that he had pitted against Szemere's evidence and Amarinth's doubts,

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clinging to it with blind, unswerving faith. Now, before his mental vision, rose again her meeting with Aubert, her face distorted with hate, the thrust of her arm, the glint of steel. She had caught up the knife from the surgical tools on the table — the first weapon that came to hand. On that morning seven years ago she had had a dagger in her bodice, ready — for what?

Who was she? And what was Aubert to her or she to him? His terror at sight of her had been evident. And now he was gone. Where? He had been called to Chicago, the young woman in his office had said, adding that perhaps he had had to hurry off like that to make his train. The idea was absurd, of course. He had run away. Why?

Would the girl be able to explain when she awoke? What would she know of the necklace and the cross? Would she deny Szemere's story or confirm it?

During the afternoon a formal note had come from the Count, stating that the papers needed for the legal identification of the jewels would be sent as rapidly as possible from Rumania. From Amarinth had come a written request that proceedings for the annulment of his marriage be begun. A third communication had arrived, announcing the hour of Andrus's funeral.

And the girl slept.

After a while Mrs. Thorley rose and whispering that she would return presently left the room. As the door closed after her, Hugh leaned forward and let his eyes dwell unrestrainedly upon the beloved face on the pil-

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low. From his mind vanished all besieging cares, doubts, speculations, fears for the future. He was alone with the woman he loved, as probably he would never be again, alone and unwatched even by her eyes, free to gaze, to worship.

Then suddenly a slender hand lying outside the coverings stirred and was thrown above the loose masses of dark hair. He caught his breath and drew back, rigid, intent. For a minute or two there was no further movement from the sleeper, then abruptly she opened her eyes.

The room was faintly lit by a drop-light on the desk in one corner and it was toward that spot that the awakening eyes turned. A slight frown wrinkled the forehead above, then a hand shot out and pressed the electric button on the wall near the bed, and as the room filled with light the hand moved swiftly toward a small enameled clock standing on the table at the bed's head.

Hugh's heart gave a bound of relief and joy. She knew where she was!

"Hugh!"

Both hands flew to her breast with an instinctive movement of modesty, then feeling not the fabric of her night dress but of a silk blouse beneath her fingers, she stared down at it with surprise.

"What is it? What has happened?"

He hesitated a moment, not knowing what he ought to tell her.

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"You have been ill," he said at last.

"Ill!"

On the word a change swept her face. Wonder gave way to something else — was it eagerness or fear? With dilated eyes she looked at him.

"Did I kill him?"

"No."

Her head dropped to her hands and she sat shuddering. But only for an instant. She looked up and now he could see that she was struggling to recall some mental image that evaded her.

"I remember now," she murmured at last, "some one called: 'Look out!' It made me think of something — something that happened to me once — long ago, perhaps — I don't know. I was on the street — in Paris — it was dark — I heard a voice call like that: 'Look out!' Then — then —" She paused and passed a hand over her face as if to brush aside something that obstructed her mental vision, and her glance wavered away from him.

He did not speak, fearful of cutting the thread of memory she seemed to have caught from the forgotten past; but suddenly, she broke the silence with a sharp cry and flung herself face downward on her pillows while her body shook with sobs. Then, as abruptly, she jerked her head about and looked at him.

"It's come back — it's all come back. I remember everything."

She began to talk, vaguely and disconnectedly at first,

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halting often for periods of silent probing of her mind. Now and then he asked a question, seeking to help her, and presently Mrs. Thorley returned and she too ventured a word of comment or inquiry as it seemed needed. Thus, bit by bit, they learned her history. And much that she did not tell their knowledge of the world supplied until at last all was clear to them.

CHAPTER XXV

IT had been thirty years since Sonia Korskova had come from Russia to dance at the Paris Opera. Young, beautiful, wondrously trained in her art, she soon had the city at her feet, and for three years her career was a triumph. Names among the greatest in France were offered her only to be rejected, for it was not marriage nor love that she craved, only fame, adulation, power. The greater the wealth and rank of the men who sought her, the higher she held herself above them. Then, after three years the end came — a dash of vitriol from the hand of a rival dancer had in an instant snatched from her all but mere existence.

In a darkened room the wretched girl lay for weeks trying to face her future. At first a stream of visitors besieged her house with anxious inquiries and their flowers made a bower of her apartment; but when it became known that the lovely face was changed beyond recognition admirers scurried away like rats from a doomed ship. All, but one. Each day a small bouquet arrived with the same card, each day brought to the door the patient countenance of young Jean de Ravelle.

And always at sight of the card and flowers Sonia Korskova would sigh, for who was Jean de Ravelle but

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an insignificant youth who had written verses in her honor, and to whom she had sometimes been gracious as torture to a more important suitor.

"And what does this Monsieur de Ravelle want of me?" she asked at last of her maid. "Why does he come here day after day and week after week?"

"He desires but to kiss the hand of Mademoiselle," the woman replied, wiping away a tear, for the young man's devotion had touched her heart.

But Sonia Korskova laughed bitterly.

"My hand! He has chosen well! Let him come and look at my face, then he will go his way and trouble me no more."

So Jean de Ravelle was admitted and he kissed the hand of Sonia and looked at her face, but did not go away. Instead he stayed and told her of his old, half-ruined château in the mountains near the line where France meets Spain, and he spoke as a poet speaks, and because in every artist there is a poet's soul, something quickened in the dying heart of the dancer.

And Jean came again to her the day after and other days after that, and then one night she wound a veil about her head, and she and her lover journeyed from Paris southward, and were married in the crumbling chapel of the château in the Pyrenees.

They lived alone. Jean was an orphan without sisters or brothers and they had no visitors, for they were poor, but for a time they were contented and Jean, at least, was happy. Then the keen air of the mountains

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stirred the young blood of Sonia with a mad desire to live once more, to dance once more. She had a plan; she would pose as a Turkish lady of rank and dance with veiled face. With a heavy heart Jean took her to Madrid and there she danced and again her grace and skill brought her renown. But the day came soon when she was recognized and her story flew through the city and that night hoots of derision drove her from the stage. And Jean took her home.

Then were born the twins, Alix and Jeannette, and three years passed and Jean believed that at last peace had come to stay with them. But one day a Paris journal found its way to the château and in it Sonia read of a surgeon in London who had cut the burnt skin from a woman's face and replaced it with smooth skin from her body, and from that day the dancer dreamed and talked of nothing but the great surgeon who was able to restore her beauty. Finally Jean was persuaded. Selling all that he owned in the world except the old château which no one would buy, he took his family to London.

There Sonia lay in the hospital and Jean lived in cheap lodgings with his little daughters until, his money growing low, he found employment as a teacher of French, and the children were put to board in the country. For five years their parents saw them seldom for they were too poor for frequent visits. Sonia's disfigurement had been in some degree lessened, but the improvement did not permit of her resuming her pro-

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fession, and they could not return to their home in France, for without the small income they had had formerly, they would have starved. So they dragged wearily through the years, Jean at his teaching, Sonia with a small dancing-class, but for the most part listless and ill.

Then suddenly she took heart again. In her daughters she had seen a ray of light, an opening to a better future. They were brought from the country and she began teaching them her art, training them relentlessly as she had been trained in Russia. Hours and hours a day she spent with them, neglecting nothing, excusing nothing. All her pent-up energy and thwarted ambition surged into the new outlet. With feverish eagerness she watched for results and results came, for the children had inherited her aptitude. Confusingly alike in appearance they were unlike in temperament. Jeanette had her father's nature, unselfish, devoted, tender; in Alix, Sonia found reflected her own dominant will and spirit.

And so it was upon Alix that the mother came gradually to center her hopes, to Alix that she told and retold the tale of her stage triumphs. Almost hypnotically she played upon the child's mind. "When you are *première* at the Opera in Paris," was her preface to remarks of instruction or advice or to glowing descriptions of future luxury and pleasure, until "When I am *première* at the Opera" became to the girl a date from which she counted everything.

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When the twins were fourteen a small legacy came to Jean from a distant relative and Sonia hailed it as a sign from heaven pointing straight to Paris. But now the gentle Jean was obdurate. His wife's health had long been failing and the doctor's verdict had been ominous. If a sign from heaven pointed anywhere it was to the old home in the mountains where there was clean air for ailing lungs. Reluctantly, Sonia consented to go there for the winter; in the spring they would go to Paris.

But she never saw Paris again. The change of air had come too late and she died the following summer in the obscurity which all her life her soul had loathed. Her death left her husband broken-hearted and almost penniless, for the legacy had been spent on doctors and comforts for the invalid. Accordingly he announced to his daughters that they must return at once to London where he was sure of an income from his teaching.

But at this Alix rebelled. Why not go to Paris as her mother had planned?

"My dear little one, what then shall we do in Paris?"

"*I shall dance!*" answered Alix.

Jean looked at her and sighed. "My poor child, without money or friends to secure for you a theater you cannot dance in Paris. I know Paris. We should starve."

"What do you wish me to do in London?"

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"In London we have friends. I shall speak to my patrons and they will perhaps find for you pupils of dancing."

"Let them find them for Jeannette, if she wishes; for myself, I prefer to starve."

She coughed — she had, indeed, a slight cold — then looked up at her father.

"I hate London. I hate the cold and rain and fog. They killed my mother." And she coughed again.

The cough went to her father's heart like a knife. Without a word he turned and walked away.

"You're a wicked girl!" Jeannette cried out, when he was gone. "You did n't need to cough — you did it to frighten him."

"I am not going to London," said Alix. "And I shall not teach dancing. I'm sixteen. I'm not a child and I want to live. I want to dance as my mother danced and live as she lived. And I shall too, do you hear? I shall!"

"What are you going to do? You're not going to Paris alone!"

"Don't be silly. How can I go to Paris alone? I have n't any money and I can't walk there, can I?"

And overcome by a realization of her helplessness, she burst into tears.

That evening a letter arrived from London which brought about a compromise. It was from a pupil of Jean's who was about to set out for Palermo, Sicily, where her brother was British consul, and who inquired

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if Mr. Ravelle could recommend to her a teacher of French there, as she was anxious to continue her studies.

"Through her I shall find other pupils," said poor Jean hopefully. "The climate of Palermo is mild and — there is an opera there."

But in Palermo disappointment met them at every turn. Jean found few pupils, Jeannette fewer still and Alix no engagement. At the Opera the Russian ballet was not popular, and of those which were given she did not know the ensemble numbers. Her mother had taught her only the solo parts and all the solo dancing, it appeared, was done by a charming friend of the director's.

The theaters were next tried, then the music-halls. Some of her experiences she dared not relate to her father, but she told her sister of them, and after each odious interview Jeannette would beg her to consent to their return to London. But the answer was always the same.

"I shall never leave here except to go to Paris."

Finally, toward spring, she obtained an engagement in a minor music-hall. The pay was poor but it was something and by that time badly needed. She made a success which in a place of more importance might have led to advancement, but there the clientele — with one exception — was too ignorant to appreciate her worth. The exception was Dr. Felix Renoir, a young Frenchman who had come from Paris to study for a

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few months under a surgeon of Palermo who had developed an original technique in intracranial surgery.

Happening one evening to meet the girl on her way to the theater he had followed her and after the performance had sought an introduction. Gratified and flattered by the praise of a Parisian, she had encouraged his attentions, had received him at her home, and before she realized what was happening, had fallen in love with him.

Perceiving that luck was with him, he played to win. And he had every opportunity, for Jean de Ravelle's long residence in London had made him as unwatchful as an English father. Night after night Jeannette lay awake listening to Alix's repetitions of Renoir's stories of Paris and to her ecstatic prophecies of what her life would be when she and Felix were married.

Then one day, without a hint of his intention or a word of farewell, Renoir left Palermo. Alix learned the fact the following day at his lodgings, and afterwards for hours, in a hidden spot on the seashore where they had often met, she stared out across the waters in a blind stupor, or writhed in frenzy on the sand. Through storms of fury and despair she reached at last the calm of a resolved mind. Returning home she said to her father: "Dr. Renoir has gone back to Paris," and to her sister as quietly: "He has deserted me," and after that his name was not spoken between them.

And now, secretly, she took a way of earning money

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which her father had forbidden. She offered herself as a model to several foreign artists who she had been told paid well for such service. To the American painter, John Andrus, she was soon giving all the time possible without her father's knowledge, and every penny that he paid her, she hoarded. Then one day, at his chance mention of Paris, a new plan was born in her and out of the experience of a game played and lost she played again and won, for this time it was the man who gave all and she nothing.

"Will you take me to Paris if I marry you?" she asked him.

"Where else should I take you? That is where I live."

"Take me there. Then I will marry you."

He shook his head. "I will take you only as my wife."

She studied his face suspiciously, thinking that it is as easy to desert a wife as a sweetheart, but the clear honesty of his eyes abashed her.

She had not told him of her father or Jeannette nor them of him. She had grown cautious and secretive. To him she had said she was an orphan living with harsh relatives, that she was very poor and very unhappy.

They were married the afternoon they left Palermo. In the morning while her father was away occupied with pupils she packed her trunk and sent it to the dock. To the weeping Jeannette she said:

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"Tell Father that I am married. Take him to the registry to see the names. They will be there."

"But surely you will wait and say good-by to him!"

"When I am in Paris I will write. In the meantime you must take my place at the theater so as not to lose the money. Stop crying and listen! I have left you my stage clothes. Last night I danced the solo from 'Kaneshka'; to-night you will do it and if you are careful no one will suspect the change."

"Alix, my darling Alix, I hope you will be very, very happy," sobbed Jeannette when the moment of parting had come.

Alix said nothing.

"You are going to Paris at last!" Jeannette continued, trying to smile bravely. "And soon you will be *première* at the Opera, as Mother always said."

Alix drew herself from the clinging arms and picked up her traveling-bag.

"I am not going to Paris to dance," she said as she turned away; "I am going there to kill a man."

CHAPTER XXVI

THAT night the unhappy Jeannette danced at the theater and the following day she took her father to the registry of marriages and read there the names of John Andrus and Alix de Ravelle. Then began the vain waiting for the promised letter.

Summer brought almost actual want of food, for Jean's pupils went away, Jeannette's theater closed, and the artists of whom in her desperate need she sought employment were gone also. Work she found at last with a kindly woman who taught her to embroider with beads on silk scarfs for the tourist trade.

It was tedious and confining work for the long, hot days, but the girl did it gladly for the sake of the meager pay. Her father could find nothing but heavy manual labor for which he was unfit, and his sense of uselessness was slow torture to him. He brooded, hardly eating or sleeping, and when in the fall a mild fever, common in that climate, attacked him, it brought a quick end.

After his death Jeannette moved to a tiny room in the attic of her employer's house. All day long she stitched beads and at night danced, for the theater had now reopened. Doggedly she made each waking hour yield her a profit, and when the debt left from her

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father's funeral was paid, like a miser she watched her savings grow. But another spring had come before her goal was reached.

She arrived in Paris toward the middle of April and found lodgings with the family of a small shopkeeper, friends of her employer in Palermo. To the latter, who knew nothing of her sister, she had said that she was going to Paris to seek an engagement as a dancer and this story she repeated on her arrival. She had money enough to live for a few weeks and by the time it had gone she must surely have found Alix, or learned her fate.

In her search she had two clues: the names of John Andrus and Dr. Renoir. Concerning the latter she dared ask no questions, for she had not ceased to shudder at the memory of her sister's parting words. Perhaps Alix had carried out her threat and was now herself dead or in prison. Why else had she not written?

In inquiring for Andrus she was also apprehensive, though of what she could not have said. His address was obtained from a dealer in artists' supplies, who took her for a model, and when she arrived at the studio, a good-natured woman with a broom in her hand opened the door.

Monsieur was out, she said.

"And Madame?" Jeannette inquired.

The woman grinned broadly. "Mademoiselle deceives herself," she said. "There is no Madame Andrus."

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Jeannette clutched dizzily at the door-frame. "She is dead?" she faltered, thankful for the veil which partially concealed her face.

"Dead! She is not yet born!" the woman cried with a laugh. "It is to say," she explained, "Monsieur is a bachelor."

Mumbling an apology, Jeannette turned away and the door closed behind her. There was some mistake, of course; there must be another John Andrus. She inquired at other shops, many of them, but apparently only one American painter of that name was known to Paris.

What could it mean? With her own eyes she had read the marriage record in Palermo. "Alix, where are you, where are you?" she sobbed into her pillow that night.

She awoke in a desperate mood. Four days in Paris and nothing accomplished! She could no longer bear the suspense of ignorance. She must know, at least, if Renoir were alive and if so she would go to him boldly for news of Alix.

A plan occurred to her. To the people with whom she lodged she pretended that she had a cousin, a Dr. Ravelle, who would help her if only she were able to find him, and they advised her to inquire at the public registry of physicians, where, if he were in Paris, she would find his name and address.

Thus she learned that Renoir was living. Hastening to his address she was told that he was occupied in

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his laboratory and could not be disturbed until five o'clock. On her return at that hour she was about to enter the building when to her astonishment she met her sister, just emerging from it.

"Jeannette!" Alix cried in amazement and they fell into each other's arms.

"Come," Alix said then, and beckoning to a passing cab, she drew her sister into it. "What are you doing here?" she asked when the cab had started. "Where is father?"

"He is dead," said Jeannette, and clinging to Alix as though fearful of again losing her, she told what had happened during their separation.

The story was interrupted by the arrival at Alix's home. Jeannette stared about the charming apartment curiously.

"Where is your husband?" she ventured finally.

"We separated the day we arrived in Paris. I did n't love him and he knew it. It was better for both of us."

Jeannette hesitated. "I went to his studio to find you and a servant told me he was not married," she faltered.

"No one knows that we are," said Alix. "He wanted to surprise his friends and so had not written of his marriage. That made it possible to go back to his old life and say nothing."

"Do you never see him?"

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"Yes, sometimes he comes to see me dance. Sometimes he comes here. People think he is in love with me, that's all."

She stopped suddenly and going to Jeannette she laid her hands on her shoulders. "Listen," she said earnestly. "If you should ever need help of any kind, go to him — to John."

"But what help shall I need now that I have found you?" asked Jeannette in surprise.

"Oh, I don't know — you never can tell. I might die or — well, you never know what may happen. He would help you. He is good — the only good man I have ever known — except Father."

With a sigh she turned away and for a moment neither spoke.

"But come, tell me what you did after that — after you left the studio."

"Then I found out where Dr. Renoir lived," said Jeannette. "Oh, Alix, how glad I was when I knew that he was still alive. I had been so afraid — you know you said —"

"Yes, I know. And I meant it. I hated him. I wanted to make him suffer as he had made me. But when I saw him again, heard him speak, touched him —"

She sprang up and her arms went out in a gesture of surrender. "I'm a woman, Jeannette, and you are still a child — you can't understand."

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Jeannette did not answer; she did not know what to say. She could only follow her sister's restless movements with anxious eyes.

"I loved him first, I shall love him always," Alix said suddenly with a deep note of fatality in her voice. "When I arrived here he was in Germany, studying, and for months I had to wait and wait. I got an engagement to dance at the Opera —"

"The Opera! Oh, Alix!"

Alix laughed shortly. "Not as *première* — in the corps. And I was thankful even for that! But I was ashamed to have it known that the daughter of Sonia Korskova should hold such a poor position so I took the name of Floria and said I was Italian. I hoped that when they saw me dance I should be promoted, but I soon found there was no chance of that. Then he came back. He said I was wasting my time, that I must dance where I could be seen, and he found me a place in a small theater. I made a success and was engaged for a better place, in a new theater. That is where I dance now — the *Pigeon Pourpre*."

"What an odd name!"

"All theaters of that kind have odd names. It is a fashion. Well, I have had a success. The men who come to see me dance are very rich and buy a great deal of champagne, and so I am valuable and am paid accordingly."

"Alix!"

"That is Paris. I cannot change it. It was so be-

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fore I was born. But come. We shall have dinner. You shall help me. It will be like old times. I have given my maid a holiday, so we are all alone."

When dinner was over Alix prepared to go to the theater. Jeannette was not permitted to accompany her. "It is not a place for you," she was told.

"To-night you will stay here," said Alix. "Tomorrow — well, we shall see. Don't wait up for me — I may be very late. Go to bed and sleep."

She kissed her sister affectionately several times and Jeannette was too happy at the unusual demonstration to wonder at it.

"Sleep well," Alix said, with another kiss as she turned back from the door. "And remember what I told you: if you ever need help go to John Andrus."

CHAPTER XXVII

L EFT alone, a feeling of strangeness overcome Jeannette. She tried to shake it off by wandering about the apartment, examining the furnishings, pictures, clothes. The last interested her particularly. But the sense of loneliness increased and she at last decided not to undress and go to bed until Alix had returned. She lay down on a couch with a book intending to read, but weariness overtook her and she soon fell asleep.

A touch on her arm awakened her and she found Alix bending over her.

"Jeannette, wake up, I need you!" she was saying excitedly.

Jeannette sat up in alarm. "What's the matter?"

"Open your dress at the neck," Alix directed, and while the other wonderingly obeyed, she opened a handbag and took out a jeweled necklace. This she clasped about Jeannette's throat, then refastened the dress, so concealing it. "Now put this on," she ordered, and slipping out of the long, fur-trimmed coat she wore, she helped her sister into it, then wound over her head a scarf.

"Now listen carefully, Jeannette," she said. "This

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is what you must do. At the entrance of this house a cab is waiting. Get into it and tell the chauffeur to go to the Hotel Meurice. He 'll know where it is. When you arrive there pay and dismiss him. Here is my purse. In front of the Meurice you 'll find another cab—perhaps several, so watch carefully. At the window of one a hand will appear holding a lighted cigar. This one you will get into without speaking.”

“Oh, Alix!”

“You need n't be afraid; no one will harm you. In the cab there will be a man. Tell him that you are my sister—the sister of Mademoiselle Floria, remember. Speak French; he does n't know any English. Take off the necklace and give it to him and tell him that I have changed my mind. That 's all you need say—he 'll understand. Then get out of the cab, take another, and come back here. In the purse is money enough for everything.”

“But what does it mean, Alix? Why must I do this?”

“When you return I 'll explain. I 'll tell you everything. Now there 's no time, you must hurry.”

“But why don't you go yourself? Would n't that be better?”

Alix shook her head impatiently.

“If he once got me into that cab he 'd never let me go again. Don't look so frightened! Nothing will happen to you. Do hurry! It will be all right, I tell you.”

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Through the silent hall and down the dim stairs of the sleeping house Jeannette went shivering, and her teeth chattered as she gave her order to the waiting chauffeur. The streets seemed very dark and empty and still, the only sounds beings those of revelers in the cafés along the way; there was no movement on the river except the winking of distant lights, and the colonnades of the Rue de Rivoli seemed peopled with creeping shadows. It must be very late, she thought.

The cab stopped. She stumbled out, and as she stood, feeling in her purse with nervous hand for the fare, her eyes peered along the dark line of waiting vehicles. From the window of one of them an ungloved hand suddenly shot out, and at sight of it her fingers fumbled the coin and it rattled to the pavement. Mechanically, she groped for it, recovered it, and handed it to the chauffeur. He mumbled a word of thanks for the tip it included and put his car again into motion.

A moment she lingered, her knees shaking violently, then forcing her limbs to action she advanced toward the beacon of the cigar's red glow. As she neared it the cigar was dropped into the gutter below, the door of the cab was thrown open and a hand caught hers and drew her in. The next instant the door slammed and the car started.

Before she had time to speak, hardly, indeed, to think, an arm was clasped about her and a deep, guttural voice close to her face said in French: "At

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last!" Then she felt the brush of hair on her mouth, then the fierce pressure of lips.

With the strength of abhorrence and terror she tore herself away.

"Wait! Wait!" she panted. "There's a mistake!"

"What!"

"Stop the cab! I'll explain. I'm not Alix—I'm not Mademoiselle Floria!"

"What!" came again more sharply from her companion, held from her for the moment by his own astonishment.

"Stop the cab! Stop it at once!" she cried, and began beating frantically at the window. The next instant a light was flashed in her face and she recoiled from it, blinded.

The man with her laughed and dropped his electric torch back into his pocket.

"You are in a merry mood to-night, my darling," he said, and took her again in his arms.

He thought she was jesting! The import of that struck cold fear to her heart. Her sister's words came back to her: "If he ever got me in that cab he'd never let me go again." And now he believed he had her! Her resemblance to Alix had always puzzled people. Why had they not thought of that? How now was she to convince him of his mistake?

She tried to free herself from his embrace and could not. Held by his tense muscles her struggles were

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like the futile squirmings of an infant. She tried to scream and could not, half-choked and smothered as she was. His face was over hers, his lips traveled from her mouth to her eyes and her throat and back again to her mouth. The odor of stale smoke and wine hanging about him stifled her and she sickened with the horror of his nearness. A nausea seized her, she grew faint —

In her next moment of consciousness she was lying back against the cushions of the cab, with a burning sensation in her throat and a sharp pain in her eyes. And opening her eyes she was again blinded by the strong light from her companion's torch.

Seeing this he shifted it slightly, and thus released from its direct rays, she was able to look at him. He was leaning over her, an uncorked brandy flask in his hand. His face was dark and glowering and the gaze he bent on her, searching and intent.

"Mademoiselle, who are you?" he asked abruptly, and at the question she gave a gasp of relief. He knew then that she was not Alix!

She sat up. "Monsieur, I am the sister of Mademoiselle Floria — her twin sister. It was only to-day that she learned I was in Paris. She sent me in her place to-night to give you back your necklace and to tell you that she had changed her mind."

At her words a dark flush overspread the man's face and the muscles of his face twitched violently.

"Where is she now?" he asked gruffly.

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"At home."

"I see. It is well. We shall return to Paris, at once."

He leaned forward and tapped at the window behind the chauffeur.

"Return to Paris!" she echoed in surprise, and turning, looked out upon a country roadside. In the near distance a tiny village huddled in the darkness and suddenly she felt the car bump over the tracks of a railway. Paris lay far behind them.

"It took some time to restore you—you had fainted," her companion explained, and rapped again more sharply at the window. But the chauffeur gave no sign of having heard. With an impatient exclamation the man threw the door of the cab open and called out imperiously: "Stop!"

The car came to a halt and the chauffeur appeared at the door.

"Return to Paris," said his employer curtly and gave the door a jerk to close it.

But it did not close. The chauffeur blocked its way. He had moved sharply at the order and now stood, head thrust forward, peering past the man at Jeannette. His face was in shadow and she could make out no feature of it, but her companion who was nearer, seemed to distinguish enough to startle him, for with the brusque demand: "Who are you?" he flashed a light.

There was an instant's illumination, time enough for

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Jeannette to take in only the full beard which concealed the lower part of the chauffeur's face and the visor of the cap which hid his eyes. The next moment he had seized the electric torch.

"It's I, Alix! On guard!" he cried, and with that sprang at the man. The impact threw the latter back and reaching wildly for support he clutched the collar of her coat. She felt the drag at her neck, heard the sound of breaking threads, then saw the two men locked in each other's arms in the road.

Astonishment and fright rendered her incapable of thought, but instinct moved her to action, to flight, anywhere away from those mad, struggling beasts.

Opening the door at her side she slipped noiselessly to the ground and to the border of grass that stretched along the stone wall at the roadside. Then, without a thought of caution, as heedlessly as a frightened rabbit, she began to run. Behind her she could hear the scuffling of feet and panting, gasping breaths.

Suddenly she reached a turning in the road and paused a moment. To her right she saw again the squatting village that she had noted a few minutes earlier. Houses meant refuge. Turning she sped toward them.

In the middle of the road she had taken were railway tracks and on either side grew trees and shrubbery. Keeping close to the latter she dashed on through the dark. Then, of a sudden, she came to a



"It's I, Alix! On guard!" he cried



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halt and dropping to the ground, lay there, her heart beating wildly.

The motor came on and stopped and there followed a moment of silence. Then a voice called out: "Alix, Alix! Where are you?" Another pause, then: "Come here, you fool!" Again a wait and a snarl of rage and an oath.

Then the car moved again and came on slowly and at intervals the voice called out, commanding, swearing, pausing now and then to listen, then again calling sharply: "Alix! Alix!"

Jeannette hardly breathed. Each moment she counted as the last before discovery. The voice that called was the voice of the chauffeur, the man with the beard and the cap over his eyes. Who could he be? And where now was the other man? What had happened? What would happen when he found her?

Another loud call, then a long wait, then sounds of the car moving. She held her breath, then gave a gasp. The car had turned, was passing her again, was going back! Then he was not sure, that man, that she had come this way! She had had the incredible luck to turn into this road before her flight was noticed. She lay without stirring until the whirl of the car had grown faint, then ventured to raise her head and look down the road. The motor was not in sight. It must have turned the corner. But it was still moving, she could still hear it — just hear it —

Sh! What was that?

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Far, far away in the distance a whistle blew — a railway whistle. As clearly as it pierced the air it seemed to pierce her brain, letting in the light of reason. Just ahead was a village and a railway station. Perhaps the train she heard would stop there, perhaps it was bound for Paris. She listened. Yes, yes, it was coming that way —

CHAPTER XXVIII

HALF an hour later she was mounting the stairs to her sister's apartment. Alix was waiting, wild-eyed and pale.

"My God!" she cried, wringing her hands when she had heard Jeannette's story. "And you don't know how it ended, this fight?"

"I only know that it was the chauffeur who tried to find me —"

"The chauffeur was Felix Renoir," Alix interrupted. "Listen. I must tell you everything for you must help me. He will come here. I am sure of it. Any moment now he may come. Listen. He must not know it was not I in the cab. If he found out I had failed him he would never forgive me. Jeannette, don't look at me like that! Try to understand. I love him and he drove me mad. Others fell at my feet but I could not move him. I played with the others to hurt him, to make him jealous. One of these was Prince Xico of Rumania. He had a wonderful necklace with a sacred cross that had been in his family for centuries. I wore it to dance. John painted me in it — he did not think that it was real. All Paris talked. But I cared nothing for the Prince or for his

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necklace. I cared only that I had at last touched Felix. He came every night to see me dance and I was happy. Then a week ago he stopped coming and I heard that — there was another woman. I was beside myself!

"Yesterday the Prince came to me. The King had commanded his return to Bucharest and he had come to say good-by. He had the necklace with him and he put it on me. 'Kiss the cross,' he said, and to humor him I did it. Then he took it from my hand and wrenched it from the necklace and kissed it and held it up and looked at me. 'Now you are mine forever,' he said. 'Forever your fate is linked with mine.'"

"What did he mean?" asked Jeannette.

Alix shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"He is ignorant and superstitious. It is a legend in his family that the cross is sacred and has some sort of magic power. Centuries ago some witch predicted that it would be broken from the necklace three times. It had happened twice, he said; this was the third time. 'Now, when we die, you and I, it will be in the same hour and by the same hand,' he said."

"The same hand? What did he mean, Alix?"

"That we'd be murdered, I suppose — people were always killing one another in those days. Of course, I did n't believe such silly rubbish! But he begged me to go away with him to Russia. I should dance at the Petersburg Opera, I should be famous, then I could

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come here to the Opera. At last I said I would go — anything seemed better than staying here to see Felix at the feet of another woman. The Prince left the necklace with me and took the cross, and I agreed to meet him in a cab at the Meurice after I had finished dancing. He stayed away from the theater to throw a friend, Count Szemere, who was always with him, off the track.

“Well, after he was gone I thought of Felix. I could not go away without seeing him again. So I went to his laboratory and told him that I was going to Russia with the Prince. ‘To Russia?’ he said. ‘Yes, he will take you to Russia and leave you there to starve. But his wonderful necklace he will leave safely in Paris until he returns. Is that not so?’ ‘No, he will take it with him, and I shall wear it when I dance in St. Petersburg!’ I answered angrily to his sneers. ‘He has it now and everything is prepared.’

“He looked at me a long time without saying anything, then suddenly he caught me in his arms. He told me then that he had always loved me, but had been too poor to marry in Palermo and had gone away as he had, thinking that if I hated him I would soon love some one else and that would be best for me. He was only a poor surgeon, but if he had anything — even such a necklace as that of the Prince — we could go to America together and be happy. Oh, I don’t remember all he said. When his arms are round me I can’t think. Then suddenly he said he had a plan.

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I was to meet the Prince as I had promised and persuade him to let me have the cross to carry in my dress with the necklace, for safety. At Argonne, where we should stop for essence, he, Felix, would be waiting in another car. He would signal me, I could slip out and join him and we should catch a train and then a boat for America. Well — I agreed."

"Alix! That was stealing!" cried Jeannette.

"I was desperate. It was my one chance of happiness. I promised. Then when I left the house — I met you. And when I went to the theater last night I expected never to see you again, Jeannette. That was why I told you to go to John Andrus if you ever needed help. But during the evening something came over me — I can't explain it — perhaps it was the old memories of Father and Mother which you had brought back — I don't know. But I realized that I could never do the thing I had promised Felix, nor could I go away with the Prince. So I sent you to give the necklace back. I thought that would end the matter. I meant to tell Felix that the Prince had changed his mind. And now —"

"Alix, I have the necklace still!" Jeannette exclaimed. "I had no chance to give it to him."

She raised her hands to her throat to take off the jewels, but a cry of warning from her sister stopped her.

"Sh!"

Alix threw her head up in an attitude of listening.

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"That was a step on the stairs — he is coming," she whispered. "Come with me — quick!"

She led Jeannette to the rear of the apartment and opening the door of a small, dark room pushed her into it.

"This is my maid's room," she said. "Lock the door and wait. Be quiet — and don't light the lamp. He must not suspect that you are here. I want him to think I kept my word to him. When he is gone I will come and tell you. Don't stir until I come and call you!"

In the darkness Jeannette waited. She had heard her sister's receding footsteps, the closing of a door, then for a time, that seemed endless, nothing more. At last the sound of steps again reached her and she started up from the chair to which she had groped her way. It was Alix coming back! But the steps came to a halt and retreated again.

Once more she waited, ears strained to attention. No other sound. She shivered with the cold and with a dread she could not define. Then, of a sudden, it struck her that a change had come over her surroundings. Objects in the room which had appeared like dark, lurking forms now showed dimly for what they were. She could make out some garments hanging over a chair, and on a rude dressing-table the outlines of some simple toilet articles.

Among these last the glint of steel struck her eye and looking closer she saw that it came from the blade

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of a knife, a dirk with a rough bone handle. She stared at it absently. Its presence there did not surprise her; she had often seen such weapons carried by the peasants of Sicily and Southern France, for their protection. But now the things about her grew more and more distinct and turning to a window she saw a faint streak of light in the sky. The day was breaking!

In alarm she started up. Hours must have passed. What could have happened? At the door she listened, listened. Silence. Suddenly resolve tensed her nerves. She would wait no longer.

Noiselessly she turned the key, and as she did so the fingers of her free hand darted out and grasped the knife from the dressing-table. The act was unconscious, instinctive, a heritage from forebears of the Pyrenees or Steppes. The door open, she instantly transferred the weapon to her right hand, and pressed the hand against her side, hiding the blade in the folds of her skirt.

The gray light of dawn filled the rooms through which she passed in swift silence. They were empty, and in a flash came the thought that her sister had gone and left her, that Felix Renoir had taken her away.

"Alix!" she called frantically, and with a wild impulse of pursuit, she dashed headlong into the salon. The sight she found there froze her in horror.

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On the floor lay the body of her sister, the head a raw, bleeding mass. The entire scalp had been cut away and the face so gashed and hacked that no semblance remained of what it had been. A long time she had been lying there, for the blood from a wound in the breast had oozed out until it colored the whole bodice, and beneath the head the rug was soaked to its edges, and from these thin streams trickled onto the waxed floor.

Frozen and mute Jeannette remained, how long she did not know. Then slowly, without conscious thought or purpose, her right hand raised itself and slipped the knife it held into the opening of her bodice, as if, after generations of disuse, the instinct which had prompted the hand to seize the dirk still guided it and her.

She began to move away cautiously lest she should tread in blood. Over a chair, where she herself had thrown it on her return that night, hung the fur-trimmed coat. Catching it up she put it on and without a backward glance hurried from the house.

As she sped through the streets one thought possessed her, and her mind subservient to that single purpose directed her steps toward the boulevard where she could find a cab to take her to Renoir's.

She was going to kill Renoir. He had killed Alix and he must die for it. That resolve enthralled her

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senses and before her mental vision floated his image —

“Look out!”

The sharply spoken English words pierced her absorption. Involuntarily she turned her head —

CHAPTER XXIX

SLOWLY the story had been drawn from Marie — or Jeannette, as it had shown her to be. There had been breaks while she sobbed despairingly for the sister she had lost, and Hugh and Mrs. Thorley had comforted her as best they could, realizing that though the facts she related were now years old, to her they were the events of yesterday.

Gently but persistently Hugh questioned her, for he knew that never again would she have the details of that tragic night so clearly in mind. The mental impressions of seven intervening years must soon crowd in and dull the memories of the past.

"It's been a hard, sad experience for you, dear child," said Mrs. Thorley, "but great good has come of it; you must think of that."

The girl assented with a quivering sigh. She looked at Hugh.

"It was your voice to-day, just as it was your voice that morning in Paris, that saved me. Think what I might have done! Oh! can one have such terrible possibilities in oneself and never even guess it? To think that I might have killed a man!"

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"You were half crazed with grief!" said Mrs. Thorley. "And no wonder! You had endured enough to turn the reason of any one."

"And this morning," Hugh added, "when you saw Renoir your mind took up the train of thought at the point where the shock of the accident had interrupted it. It was Renoir's face that filled your thoughts when my car struck you, and probably nothing except the shock of seeing that face would ever have restored your memory. His flight is confession of his guilt. He killed the Prince and stole the cross, then thinking that Alix had been in the car and knew what he had done he — silenced her."

"And they died 'by the same hand' as the Prince had said they would!" There was a touch of awe in the girl's tone.

"I don't think we shall ever see Renoir again unless —" Hugh hesitated, watching her face — "we try to find him."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "What good would that do any one?"

"You are right," he answered.

"How strange," she continued after a pause, "that all that happened to me on that terrible night should in an instant have been shut from my knowledge. But what a blessing for me!" The look of gratitude and affection that she gave Hugh and Mrs. Thorley made words unnecessary.

"It was a blessing for us all, dear child," said Mrs.

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Thorley, and Hugh's answer was to cover Marie's hand gently with his.

"But the past must have been always very near the surface. The other day when I collided with Mr. Gavock on Fifth Avenue he said I answered him in French when he spoke French, and I suppose now that I must have, though I thought I knew no French. How odd that everything should have left me except the memory of those early years when Alix and I lived in the country."

"There's no rule in such cases, the doctors tell us," Hugh said. "They can only guess, as we do, at the cause. But what I don't understand is why the people with whom you lodged in Paris did not report your disappearance to the police. Surely they must have wondered why you never came back."

"But I had told them, you see, that I was going to try to find my cousin, Dr. Ravelle. Probably they thought I had found him and did n't think my few belongings worth returning for. I had only a small bag; baggage costs so much in Europe, and I had so little money. Besides, I was nothing to those people and I had paid my week's lodging."

"Tell me, my dear, had you ever worn a dress like the one you danced in the other night?" Mrs. Thorley asked.

"My dress?" Marie repeated, pausing to follow the train of memories started by the question. "Why, that is like one of Alix's dancing dresses that I saw in

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her apartment. And my dance! They said I had changed it — Madame Adrienne said I had added part of the solo from 'Kaneshka.' I did n't know it if I did. But night after night in Palermo I danced the solos from 'Kaneshka' and that night at the Esplanade was the first time since then that I had danced in public. Perhaps, the music, the lights, the applause — I don't know. When Miss Niklova's violin string broke —"

She broke off with a start. "Miss Niklova — John Andrus — he died —"

Her listeners waited. It was evident that the impressions of the past were beginning to connect themselves with more recent ones. But as yet she seemed to grope.

"Miss Niklova was very unhappy — she loved him," she murmured vaguely. "But he was my husband — Oh, no, no! It was not I but Alix he married! Oh —" the end was a moan and she buried her face in her hands.

Her companions waited again until after a time she looked from one to the other. "I remember now. I married Guy Amarinth and our marriage is to be annulled," she said quietly.

"But now that we know all about you, he will perhaps not wish that," said Mrs. Thorley. "He will feel different now."

"I feel different too."

"Then let me send for him." She rose.

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But the girl stopped her.

"I did n't mean that," she said. "I mean that I feel that I am different from the girl who married him. Then I had no consciousness of anything except the happiness and ease that you had given me. Now, with memory of the past has come the knowledge of sorrow and want and of all the things a girl learns who makes her living in a theater. How can I be the same? How can I see things or people in the same way? Don't you understand? I could never be his wife! I want to be free from him. I want the marriage annulled."

"Well, while you two settle matters I am going to 'phone Dr. Sterling. I shan't be satisfied until he has looked Marie over." And with that Mrs. Thorley left them.

"Are you quite sure that you are not acting from hurt pride, Marie?" Hugh asked gently, when they were alone.

"I'm quite sure. As I think of him now I wonder how I could ever have married him. What an escape I've had — what an escape! Why, he seems to me now like a child. What does he know of the terrible sorrow and suffering of the world? What can he feel of the struggles of the poor and helpless? He's hard, intolerant, selfish, because he's ignorant and young. No, no, Hugh; now that all I've lived through and felt and suffered is part of me again, he and I would have too little in common. No, I want my freedom."

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"Then I shall go on with the matter without delay."

He rose to go and she too rose, and for a minute they stood facing each other without words. At last he turned away. Then she spoke.

"Last night when you knew nothing about me, when I did n't even have a name—you offered me yours. I—I shall never forget that."

"I offered you something else also," he said, his voice very low. "But you did n't want either of them."

"I want them now — both of them."

"Mariel!" He caught her hands.

"Don't you see that I was like a child who looks at things without understanding them? Why, the best thing life can give a woman was at my elbow and I did n't even see it."

"Are you sure — are you sure?" he questioned.

"I'm sure."

But still he hesitated, unsatisfied. "And it is n't gratitude?"

"Gratitude!" She lifted her eyes bravely to his that he might see her heart in them. "Kiss me!" she whispered.

He folded her in his arms and their lips met. A long time he held her so, then she drew herself away. Her face, flushed and sweet, bent a moment to hide itself from his eyes, then she looked up again and a faint smile curved the corners of her mouth.

"Thank you," she said.



